

bitter promises bleed true

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by [Araived](#)

Summary

Hitoshi will live his dream in the light, showing the world exactly what he can become. Kakashi will support him from the shadows, doing everything in his power to give his little brother what he deserves.

—

Family is everything, but unfortunately, it's a lesson Hatake Kakashi learned too late. So when he's given a second chance, reborn as the twin brother of Shinsou Hitoshi, he vows to do absolutely anything to protect his twin.

Hitoshi loves his brother, he really does. He's brilliant, and caring, and strong... but one thing he insists he's not, is a hero. What does that mean for Hitoshi? What does that mean for the world?

In this world of heroes and villains, is family enough?

Notes

Thank you to Jork for your amazing outline and RtN server members for your many great twin au ideas and snippets.

Jork, happy summer and hope you enjoy my take on your twin au! <3

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [Road to Nowhere](#) by [Aerugonian](#)

Childhood

Family. Kakashi knows family.

It's big, calloused hands giving him his first blade. It's taking his mask off at the dinner table, a hand running through his hair, a calm voice gently correcting his footwork.

Even though it's been years since he's had one, he still remembers it well. In Konoha, clan, *family*, is everything. The Konoha branch of the Hatake clan was the very last of their people. Kakashi and his father... they were the only ones that remained. Mentor and student, father and son. That's what they were. Kakashi's father had been everything to him.

Family. It's...

A shining blade, tears, a promise. Hateful words, blood painting the floor.

Afterwards, he had Minato-sensei. There was his team, darting in and out of the darkness of his life, like little slivers of light. So bright, yet so quickly extinguished. There was Gai, and Tenzou, his precious kouhai. And his adorable genin, his fierce and shining students. He loved them all, of course, even if he never would have admitted it out loud. He loved them.

But. Family.

Naruto called Sasuke his brother. Minato and Kushina told him they viewed him as a son. Family, though. It's something else. Something so powerful, so intrinsic to his very being. Impossible to describe, but there was a difference.

Kakashi had idolised his father. Back in the early days of his youth, he'd practically seen him as a god of a man, a perfect shinobi who could do no wrong. The illusion was later broken, but during those days? He'd have done anything, believed anything.

In his darkest moments, Kakashi hated his father. With Obito's words ringing in his ears, he had finally understood why his father had done what he'd done, going back and saving his teammates, even if it resulted in the start of a war. But what about the rest of it? Even with the things he'd said, family was family. How could Sakumo abandon him?

Hateful words, a promise.

If family is anything, it's duty. It's unconditional love and support; it's sacrifice. It's a vow to do anything for them, to protect them, to keep their dreams alive. Family comes before anything, family comes before yourself.

Ah, family. Kakashi knows it well.

—

Kakashi is born as Shinsou Shiro, son to Kasumi and Yoichi and elder twin to Hitoshi. He's never been a brother before, and he's initially highly alarmed at the thought. Him? Caring for a child? A small, breakable, puffy-cheeked child, who was only capable of stumbling around and shaking his fists?

He'd taken on babysitting missions, of course, but he'd always been in the guard position, looking for threats from the window, or leaving his genin to do the work while he read Icha Icha on the rooftop. And while he'd often taken shifts on Naruto guard duty, there had been no interaction.

And now he's a brother?

Kakashi quickly realizes that he has to step up. Kasumi and Yoichi may be his new blood-related relatives, but *they're* certainly not family. They were barely fit for existing in society, never mind raising two children. His nights are spent huddled in the corner of the tiny bedroom, blanket tucked around Hitoshi's small form as their parents screamed and smashed bottles in the next room over.

He spends a lot of time with his brother this way. Hitoshi has wide, round eyes, and fluffy, purple hair. His cheeks are pink and rosy, and his tiny hand automatically goes to grasp Kakashi's whenever he's scared. Whenever he does it, Kakashi feels like a bolt of lightning has just swept through his body. A familiar feeling, but something about this is different. It's not ozone and pain, a Chidori grasped in his palm, ripping through his skin. Instead, it's the soft crackle and spark of lightning chakra, a warm glow in his core and in his heart.

There's no chakra in this world, but he feels it nonetheless.

Kasumi and Yoichi are neglectful, so Kakashi does his best. He listens to the radio; he searches for books to read. Kakashi makes sure to talk to Hitoshi often, recounting lighter stories of Konoha and some of

Team Seven's more fun adventures. Hitoshi's not very good at talking yet, but he does listen, drifting along to Kakashi's soft-spoken words, and patting his face when he gets excited.

"They're my team and I love them," he says one night. It's easy to talk about it somehow, here in the warmth with Hitoshi nuzzled up at his side. "They're my team and I left them."

Hitoshi looks up at him with big, liquid eyes and gently curls his pudgy fingers around Kakashi's wrist.

"Kashi-nii," he squeaks out.

And there's the lightning again, fuzzy and insistent. It's a strange feeling. It brings with it a certain pang, a desire for action, the taste of salty warmth and desperation in his mouth.

He breathes in, and he lets go.

"That's right," Kakashi says. "I'm your brother. I'm *family*. It's me, Kakashi. Shinsou Kakashi."

Hitoshi's hands. They're so soft.

Kakashi gets on his knees. He takes Hitoshi's hands in his own, holds them in a tight grip. "Hitoshi," he says. "Hitoshi."

Kakashi makes a promise.

—

This new world is a very strange one with no shinobi and no chakra. Instead of chakra, there is instead quirks, some form of strange kekkei-genkai. Status in society seems to be highly determined by quirk type, and it's often passed down through families.

Shinsou Kasumi's quirk is able to disrupt thought. Not highly dangerous, but still very disturbing. Kakashi doesn't enjoy being on the receiving end of it. Yoichi's quirk though... it's a form of emotion manipulation. Toggling their hormones, a sudden chill of fear and breathlessness. Kakashi makes sure to keep Hitoshi well out of the way.

As for Kakashi's quirk? He's seen himself in the mirror. While his one eye is purple, and his face is different, smoothed and chubby compared to the leaner appearance of his former body, he still has his

bright silver hair. He also still has Obito's Sharingan, blood red and spinning in his left eye socket. He's not quite sure how it made the trip, but it's here, and Kakashi's reluctantly relieved. Even though he's accepted this new world as his own, he's not fully ready to give up his past just yet. There's a reason he's still calling himself Kakashi, after all.

Even if his quirk is most likely the Sharingan, he doesn't intend on using it just yet. Kasumi and Yoichi are already cautious around him. He doesn't act like a normal child, he knows that, but there's nothing he can do about it. He's too busy studying and learning about his new environment. That, and trying to teach Hitoshi. He has a brother now, and he's going to do everything in his power to protect him. This involves training, both mental and physical. Kakashi makes sure to keep his mind stimulated, encouraging early reading and more advanced trains of thought. He also runs through the easier katas, gently pushing Hitoshi to stretch and keep himself healthy.

On his own time, Kakashi works on his own fitness. He makes sure to do it out of Hitoshi's line of sight, lest his brother ends up copying him and overworking himself. Even then, Hitoshi seems to have imprinted on him, constantly following him around and vying for his attention. It isn't irritating, but it is concerning.

Hitoshi looks at him like he's hung the moon. And Kakashi, well. When has Kakashi ever been any form of a reliable role model?

Tenzou had admired him. Kakashi had never treated him like a proper kohai. He'd gotten him out of Root only to stick him in ANBU. He'd ignored him; he'd brushed aside all Tenzou's concerns and turned on him when he was only trying to help.

Still, Tenzou's dedication had never waned. Irritated and desperate sometimes, but the loyalty and resolve was in his eyes. Kakashi could see it.

"You might want to find a new senpai," Kakashi had said one day, while Tenzou was complaining about paying for dinner. He made sure to keep his tone light and teasing. "I'm sure you can go and catch a better one out there."

However well disguised, Tenzou still caught the edge to his words. "You're *my* senpai," he said, turning towards him and locking eye contact. "I would never want someone else."

The words dripped with heartfelt emotion. Kakashi barely avoided

shuddering. He pulled out his well-worn copy of Icha Icha in an attempt at hiding his discomfort. “Ah. Really.”

“Really,” Tenzou repeated earnestly. “I mean it, Kakashi-senpai.”

Yes, Tenzou was like that. Earnest and loyal, believing in him despite his many flaws. It’s different with Hitoshi though. Hitoshi isn’t even able to see his flaws. He loves him without reservation, and in Kakashi’s opinion, it’s downright worrisome.

He accepts it anyways, though. Receiving unconditional love from someone who doesn’t know any better makes him feel slightly guilty, but he still takes it. It’s far from the worst thing he’s ever done.

Kakashi’s not a good person, and he’s certainly not a good role model. He does his best though. It’s his *brother*. Of course he does his best.

He can only hope it will be enough.

—

Kakashi’s new face disturbs him. He copes by getting his hands on a box of medical masks. Apparently, this is the last straw. His parents are fed up with his strange silences, his old eyes and adult behaviour. It’s not a surprise to him when they finally snap.

It is to Hitoshi though. His little brother stumbles into the room, panic and anger on his face. “Stop it!” He demands. His hands are balled up into tight fists, and his knees quiver, but he stands tall in defense of Kakashi. “Why are you saying stuff like that about *my brother*?”

Kakashi moves to reassure him, but Yoichi stomps in close, sending the pressure in the room skyrocketing.

“You little brat,” he growls. “Don’t tell me what to—”

His eyes glaze over.

Hitoshi’s still flinching back, eyes closed. “*G-get away*,” he whispers weakly.

Mutely, Yoichi does as ordered, shambling slowly towards the other side of the room.

Hitoshi opens his eyes a crack, and gapes. “I- I-” He turns towards Kakashi, in panic. “I don’t know what’s happening!”

“It’s your quirk,” Kakashi says. Some form of genjutsu? Mind control. He places a steady hand on Hitoshi’s shoulder. “Stay calm, okay? Everything’s going to be fine. Just breathe.”

Hitoshi takes a shuddering breath in.

“That’s right,” Kakashi encourages. “Just like that.”

The next breath comes out as a shaky hiss, and with that, the control snaps. Yoichi whirls around, teeth bared, and the heavy feeling immediately pushes back down over all of them. Kakashi pushes Hitoshi behind him, settling lightly on his feet. He’s been training, sure, but his body is weak and he has no chakra. If they get into a physical fight here, he is definitely at a disadvantage.

“What the hell, *you*—”

Kakashi exhales and lets his Sharingan spin.

When Yoichi continues to move forward, it’s only to quietly take his place on the couch. He doesn’t grab or shout, simply takes the remote and sedately begins flipping through the channels. He eventually lands on a sports channel, settling in to watch it intently with the volume turned down low.

“...Kakashi?” Hitoshi asks, voice small.

Kakashi presses his eye closed, and grants Hitoshi a pat on the head. “See?” He says calmly. “Everything’s just fine.”

From the corner of the room, Kasumi lets out a short burst of hysterical laughter, before cutting it off abruptly. “I can’t believe it,” she spits. “Both of you. I can’t have anything normal, no, you’re both *villains*—”

She turns and stalks out of the room, slamming the bathroom door closed behind her.

Hitoshi tugs on his shirt. “Nii-chan, did I do something wrong?” His lip wobbles, and he looks like he’s about to cry.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” Kakashi says firmly. “We’re going to figure this out. I’ll figure this out.”

And magically, that’s enough to wipe the tears from his eyes. He looks up at Kakashi with nothing but trust, and believes him completely.

“Okay, nii-chan,” he whispers, and smiles a small, gap-toothed grin.

He trusts *Kakashi*. He believes in *Kakashi*.

Kakashi is trying his best. Please, please, let it be enough.

—

They visit the quirk specialist later that day. Kasumi takes them both, and they spend the entire drive there in tense, frigid silence. Even Hitoshi can tell something is wrong. As much as Kakashi would like to keep him oblivious, it's impossible to hide Kasumi's fear and disgust.

The staff at the specialist's office are much of the same. Once they determine that Hitoshi's quirk works through asking questions, all of them refuse to answer his brother at all. Kakashi does his best to keep his spirits up, ruffling his hair and pointing out the colourful cat posters on the walls. It works, but only slightly. Hitoshi is sufficiently distracted, but when Kakashi's own quirk comes up, things quickly get worse.

If Hitoshi's quirk made them distrustful, Kakashi's quirk causes them outright terror. None of them can figure out exactly how it works. Kakashi tries to sell them on a story of illusions and a type of distraction field produced with prolonged eye contact, but he's not sure if they fully buy it. Genjutsu encompasses so many things. It's a complete manipulation of the mind, an extremely powerful ability in this world. It's not flashy or strong, but it is terrifying.

Best to keep things quiet, then. It's always good to have an extra kunai in the holster. All he knows is that if they discover his full capabilities, it would end in disaster.

Either way, they treat both him and Hitoshi with suspicion. The secretary calls out to them as they pass by. “Aren't you two just a perfect pair of little villains?” Hitoshi's head droops, even as Kakashi pins her with a sharp glare. She stiffens, but keeps her fake, plastic smile glued to her lips.

“I don't want to be a villain,” Hitoshi confides to him once they get home, nestled in their blanket fort once more. “I'm not going to be one, right?”

“You won't,” Kakashi assures him.

Hitoshi believes him. Without reservation, Hitoshi believes him. This

absolute trust, this limitless love. This boy. *His brother.*

It's something Kakashi needs to protect.

"I love you, nii-chan," Hitoshi mumbles, and drifts off to sleep.

Something to protect indeed.

Primary

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hitoshi hates school. Don't get him wrong, he loves learning. But school itself? Even though Kakashi tries his best to hide it from him, Hitoshi's not stupid. Everyone hates him. The teachers, his fellow students, even the janitors. They all hate him.

It's all because of his stupid quirk. *Brainwash*, that's what they've named it. Hitoshi wishes he had something cool like an elemental ability, fire, or lightning even. Kakashi talks about lightning powers all the time. Wouldn't it be great if he could open his hands and let lightning bolts come flying out? Then he'd have friends for sure. Real friends, not just the weird squirrely ones who only come over to toss the ball with him after Kakashi's swooped in to have a hushed conversation with them in the corner of the play yard.

He doesn't like his quirk, but Kakashi does. He says it's interesting and useful, and then proceeds to run Hitoshi through a bunch of different scenarios where it's situationally advantageous. It's the only thing that's prevented him from avoiding its use entirely.

"Don't listen to them," Kakashi instructs, as they walk towards their usual spot nestled in the copse of trees at the very back of the park. "People fear what they can't understand. You're not a monster and you're not a villain, Hitoshi. All you need is practice."

His brother is always right, so it does make him feel better. Still, he wishes more people could be like Kakashi.

That would be difficult, though. Kakashi is one of a kind. He's super smart and he knows everything, even more than all the adults he's ever met. He has a bunch of cool talents, everything from knife handling to lock picking. And he's also insanely good at fighting.

"Keep your hands up," Kakashi orders. "And watch your punches. You're overreaching again."

Hitoshi obediently shuffles back into position. He shifts his weight and steps into it, throwing another punch. "Like that, Kashi-nii?"

"Exactly like that." Kakashi smiles at him brightly, eyes crinkling over

the edge of his mask. "You're progressing very quickly. Good job, Hitoshi."

Hitoshi beams. It's true. Before, he was only allowed to learn katas on the side and do his runs and stretches, but now he gets to spar! He could practically be a hero already.

They continue for a little bit, until Kakashi tells him to go play on the play structure while he goes on to do weapons practice on his own.

"But I can do weapons too," Hitoshi protests. "Teach me how to throw knives like you!"

"You have to learn how to properly handle the knife I gave you before you learn how to throw," Kakashi chides.

Hitoshi immediately pulls out his prized blade, nearly cutting himself in his excitement. Kakashi slams a hand over his, in alarm.

"I'll practice every day!" Hitoshi promises. "I'll learn super fast, and then you can teach me, Kashi-nii!" He's not Kakashi-level good, but if he practices really hard, then he'll definitely get it in no time.

"Maa, there's no rush," Kakashi tells him. He holds his hand and delicately removes the knife from Hitoshi's lax fingers. The next words are more serious, heterochromatic eyes fixed on his own. "This is your childhood, Hitoshi. You should enjoy it."

Hitoshi looks at his brother and his solemn eyes, and silently nods.

"Good!" Kakashi rocks back up on his heels brightly. "Off you go, then!" He shoos Hitoshi off towards the play structure. "Why don't you try out the monkey bars? See how fast you can do them!"

The monkey bars sound fun. He hops up towards the first platform, and stands on the tips of his toes but doesn't quite manage to reach the first rings. It's okay though, he knows what to do. Hitoshi wraps his arms around the side of the pole and shimmies up the support, gripping with his hands, then scooching up with his feet just the way Kakashi had shown him. From there, he manages to get his hands on the bars, and completes three circuits, before finally dropping to the ground in exhaustion.

Three times was pretty good. And he was super fast too! He'll have to show Kakashi. He looks over to where his brother is most likely throwing knives from behind the thick cover of the bushes.

His childhood, huh.

“But what about you?” Hitoshi asks quietly, but his brother isn’t there to respond.

—

Everyone knows that Kakashi is smart. Like, really smart. But it’s perfectly normal, not weird or creepy like everyone else always says. It’s *Kakashi*. He’s just like that.

Nobody else seems to understand though. Everyone hates Hitoshi, but Kakashi is a whole other story. They hate him too, but more than that, they’re completely creeped out. His brother isn’t even scary! Sure, he could probably kill a man if he tried, but he also gives really good hugs and talks in a funny voice when he wants to be annoying. Hitoshi can’t see how that would ever be scary. Everyone else is probably just jealous! That’s why they make up mean things, like that Kakashi is using his quirk on them or is cheating on his tests.

“He glared at me yesterday,” Hamasaki-chan says from the desk across from him. It’s almost the end of class, and his classmates are slacking off by gossiping instead of finishing their worksheets. “His red eye is so creepy! I thought I was going to *die*.”

“I know!” Tanaka-kun responds. “And when it starts spinning like that...” He gives an exaggerated shudder.

Why are you making things up? Hitoshi wants to demand, but he’s not allowed to ask questions in class, so he just scowls.

Hamasaki-chan leans forward, eyes brushing past Hitoshi with a mean glint shining through. “Guess what? Sasaki-chan saw him on the teacher’s computer once.”

“What do you think he was doing?”

Hamasaki-chan tosses her hair. “I think he’s changing his grades. He’s a total cheater; that’s the only way he can always get the best grades in class all the time.”

Hitoshi sends an anguished look Kakashi’s way, but his brother either doesn’t hear it, or is just ignoring everything. He usually tells Hitoshi to let things go, but how can he just sit around and listen to this ridiculousness?

The chimes begin to sound.

“You’re wrong!” Hitoshi says loudly, getting to his feet as his classmates start packing their stuff away. “Kakashi’s not a cheater!”

Tanaka-kun huffs. “Well, how come he always gets 100’s when he’s such a slacker, huh?”

“Cuz he’s smart.” Hitoshi huffs. “Smarter than you!”

The boy bristles. “Hey! I’m not dumb, you’re dumb. And you’re both future villains, so there!”

Hitoshi sneers. “And what are you going to be when you grow up, a human trash can?”

“Shinsou-kun!” His teacher snaps. Her heels click against the hardwood floor as she hurries over. “That was unacceptable. You know you’re not allowed to ask questions in class.”

“Class is over,” he protests. He clenches his fists, nails biting into his palms.

Her expression twists. “Stay here. Everyone else is free to leave.”

“They were saying horrible things about Kakashi-nii!”

“Don’t talk to me,” she orders, voice quietly furious. “Just stop talking and wait right there.” She looks at the rest of her students, who all quickly finish packing and scurry out the door.

All except for Kakashi, who lazily throws the last of his folders into his bag and then saunters up next to Hitoshi’s side.

“Is there a problem, Sensei?”

Her lips thin. “Wait outside, Shinsou-kun.”

“If there’s an issue you need to talk to Hitoshi about, you can talk to me as well.” Kakashi shoves his hands into his pockets.

“Your brother behaved inappropriately, and there will be consequences for that,” their teacher snarls. “There are rules, rules that you will follow. *Wait outside.*”

Hitoshi inhales sharply. Consequences. A sharp frisson of fear travels down his spine.

“Ah.” Kakashi straightens out of his usual slumped posture. “I see. Hm. Hitoshi, I’m going to ask you to wait outside, okay?”

“Wait outside?” He echoes nervously. Is Kakashi telling him to disobey their teacher?

She stares down at them coldly. “I told you to leave. This is your last warning.”

“Hitoshi,” Kakashi says patiently. “You trust me, right? Go wait outside, I’ll take care of this.”

He nods. Of course he trusts his brother. Hitoshi turns to leave, but hesitates at the doorway, giving the two of them one last glance. His teacher’s face is tight and pinched, but Kakashi looks back at him, gaze full of utter confidence. It makes him feel safe. Like everything’s going to be just fine.

He leaves them to it.

The talk is difficult to hear. It’s terse and short, all hushed voices and sharply drawn breaths. When Kakashi comes out, all he gets is a short glimpse of his teacher’s face, completely white as she stares down at numerous slips of paper in her hands. Then the door swings shut, and he can’t see inside any longer.

“Is it... okay?” He asks tentatively.

“Everything’s just fine.” Kakashi says. He takes Hitoshi’s hand. “Just fine. Let’s go home.”

Kakashi says it’s fine, so it must be true. They walk home hand in hand.

—

Kakashi isn’t scary. He *isn’t*. But what happens the week after their seventh birthday... He can maybe understand why some people might think he is.

He can’t even remember how the villain had gotten in. It was all crumbling walls and panicked screams, Hitoshi holding his breath tight in order to prevent choked sobs from tumbling out. Calm, one second, and pure terror the next, Hitoshi hadn’t known what to do as the villain had shoved through the door, light glinting off his deadly talons.

Kakashi had. Kakashi always knows what to do.

His brother pushes him back towards the rest of his classmates. “Don’t worry, Hitoshi, just stay calm,” he orders. He stalks forward, grabbing the metal leg of a chair, and his hands are perfectly steady. His eyes gleam, cool and collected, and he plants his feet against the floor. Calm breaths, centred weight – he looks like he’s back in the park, about to gracefully dance through yet another kata.

But this isn’t practice.

His desk is broken. It’s shattered now, cracked in two from the force of Kakashi’s rough landing. Hitoshi distantly wonders if they’ll be forced to pay for the damage. The villain’s kneeling, forced to grip onto the end of the pole protruding from his chest. And then it’s ripped out, and he has no more support. The man slumps to the ground.

And at the front of the classroom...

Kakashi. Always Kakashi. There is blood coating his hands. There is blood soaking through his uniform. There is blood pooling on the floor.

There is just *so much blood*.

His brother’s hands are still raised, even as he drops the chair leg, letting it fall to the ground with a crash. His nose twitches and his eyebrows are furrowed, but his eyes are completely blank. No horror, no regret.

For a single second, Hitoshi looks at his brother and wonders if he truly knows him at all.

And then Kakashi turns to him; the light re-enters his eyes, and even with the bleeding corpse on the floor, it’s like everything is alright with the world once more.

“See? I told you not to worry.”

—

Everyone is still crying when the heroes burst inside. Hamasaki-chan is wailing, loud, messy sobs that send gobs of mucus streaming down her chin. Hitoshi isn’t exactly sure how he feels himself. On one hand, it was terrifying. That villain had looked at them all without a speck of mercy in his eyes, and Hitoshi had known he wouldn’t have been

able to do a thing. He could be dead right now, dead and bleeding out on the floor as everyone carefully tried their best to ignore his fallen corpse.

But he's not. Dead, that is. And while his eyes are a bit teary, it's just from that initial burst of heart-stopping fear and adrenaline. He's not *scared* scared anymore. Kakashi's here. Kakashi's safe and whole, and protected him like he always does. Sure, he killed someone, and Hitoshi's kind of upset about it, but they're okay. Everyone's still okay.

One of the heroes rushes up to his brother, face a mask of frantic concern. "It's going to be okay," she says, desperation coating her voice as she pats him down, tugging at his shirt.

It's true that Kakashi hadn't gotten stabbed or anything, but he was thrown back into that desk. Is he really hurt? "Kashi-nii?" Hitoshi asks anxiously, approaching his brother. He nearly stumbles over the splintered debris in his haste, too worried to care about desk slivers and viscous crimson staining his sneakers.

It's their teacher that sets his fears to rest.

"He's not hurt," she says, usual pinched rage transformed into something else. Her eyes are glazed and her whole body is trembling. "That's not his blood, it's the villain's. The boy- he- he *killed him*."

The hero draws back, arms automatically coming up in alarm. "*What?* No..."

She looks at Hitoshi's brother like he's something to fear. She looks at him like he's the *villain*.

And so do the police when they come to take Kakashi away to the station. Hitoshi clings desperately to his brother's side until they're forced to part when Kakashi is dragged into a solo interrogation. They can't honestly be accusing Kakashi of murder, can they? It's nonsense and completely ridiculous. The chair rattles with Hitoshi's jiggling leg, as he sits sullenly in the dimly lit hallway.

"This won't take too long," Tamakawa says. His face is a cat head, soft and fluffy. "Don't worry."

It isn't Kakashi saying it, gaze certain and reassuring. No, it's a stranger in a stuffy suit, with Kakashi locked away down the hall while Hitoshi has to sit here all by himself on this crooked and uncomfortable chair. He turns away.

The man sighs. “You aren’t in trouble, Shinsou-kun.”

“What about Kakashi?” It’s his first time speaking since they’ve arrived at the station.

“Kakashi?”

“Shinsou Shiro,” he amends. “My brother.”

It’s hard to read cat expressions, but it looks like he’s grimacing. “That’s a little more complicated.”

“It’s not complicated,” a gruff voice interrupts. There’s another man striding down the corridor, expression sharp and severe. “The boy broke the quirk usage law and murdered someone.”

“Matsuda...” Tamakawa says softly.

Matsuda turns towards Hitoshi. “Your brother will be going to a child guidance centre for unauthorized quirk use. It’s for his own safety.”

What? Hitoshi narrows his eyes. “Kakashi didn’t even use his quirk!”

“There was an eyewitness.”

“I’m an eyewitness,” Hitoshi retorts, “and I know he didn’t use it.”

The man crosses his arms. “You’re hardly an unbiased witness.”

Hitoshi wants to tear his hair out. He struggles to keep his voice calm, but it starts picking up despite his best efforts. “When he’s using his quirk his eye starts spinning, which *didn’t happen*, and the villain wasn’t even acting like he was under genjutsu. And nobody likes us anyways, so of course—”

“That’s enough,” Matsuda snaps. “Shinsou Shiro is going to the child guidance centre, and you are going home. Your parents are here to pick you up.”

“He did it to protect us, and he wasn’t using his quirk!” Hitoshi’s standing up now, hands clenched into tight fists. “Why can’t you just go do an actual investigation and find out the real truth?”

“Your brother was wrong,” Matsuda says sharply, “and it would do you well not to follow in his footsteps—”

“*Shut up.*”

—

“They told me not to be like you,” Hitoshi says quietly. They sit side by side in a dull grey room, bars stretched across the only window. “They said you were wrong to do what you did.”

Kakashi isn’t even looking at him. He’s turned towards the window, eyes shuttered.

“Kakashi,” Hitoshi says.

His brother sighs. “It’s true that this society thinks what I did was murder. But Hitoshi – you’ve done all my thought exercises. Tell me, what would have happened if I had done nothing?”

The blanket is thin and linty. Hitoshi picks at the ragged edges. “They said the heroes would have saved us without any deaths.” His voice is small and uncertain.

“They arrived approximately two minutes after the incident. That’s two extra minutes for the villain to have freely acted. Try again. What would have happened?”

He’s only ever heard this tone of voice a few times before. A small hole grows in the side of the blanket as Hitoshi’s fingernails rip the threads apart.

He’s done thought exercises like this before. Battle and tactics and strategy – Kakashi had always made it fun. This isn’t fun.

“He would have really hurt or killed us.” Hitoshi whispers. “If you had done nothing – I could be dead. We could both be dead.”

Hitoshi’s mind drifts back to the classroom, but this time it’s not his own body staining the dusty floors. Bright silver hair, tired heterochromatic eyes, no, this is his brother, lifeless and still. Hitoshi’s gut is churning. With a sudden flash of insight, he knows now that he’d do absolutely anything to prevent this vision from coming true.

“That’s right,” Kakashi nods. “That villain would not have been talked down. He saw us all as targets, and taking him out as quickly and efficiently as possible was the only way to minimize casualties.”

Hitoshi nods silently, eyes back on the greying fabric.

“Hitoshi,” Kakashi says, and Hitoshi looks up. His brother is looking at

him now, eyes fierce, and protective, and so, so warm. “You don’t stand by and let people die. Even more than that, when the people you love are in danger, you protect them. You protect them with everything you have.”

People you love. *You protect them.* Hitoshi engraves these words into his soul.

Kakashi’s body loosens, and even though they’re the same height, he drops a heavy hand on Hitoshi’s head. “Ah, good.”

They lapse back into silence, but it’s a more comfortable one, this time. A few more minutes pass by before his brother speaks up once more.

“You didn’t have to come with me, you know.”

Hitoshi had been drifting off. He blinks sleepily and tries to sit back up. “What?”

“You didn’t have to use your quirk. This isn’t a good place to be, and now illegal quirk use is on your record.”

He blinks again. Did Kakashi even have to ask? Did he not understand?

“You’re my brother,” Hitoshi says simply. “I love you.”

“Oh, Hitoshi,” his brother sighs long-sufferingly. He sounds tired and achy, but still somehow content. “Whatever am I going to do with you?”

Hitoshi doesn’t say anything back, he just curls in closer. The room is hard and cold, and the mere rags posing as sheets do nothing to ward off the chill, but Kakashi is as warm as ever.

Chapter End Notes

Twin AU continues! There will be daily updates.

Centre

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kakashi learns very quickly that the so-called child guidance centre is absolutely no place for a child.

It starts with Hitoshi, wide-eyed and horrified, struggling to fall in line with the beaten-down stream of empty-eyed children. They're forbidden from using their quirks, and are punished harshly for the vaguest implication of quirk usage. Hitoshi isn't even allowed to talk to their caretakers. He's forced to hold his tongue from morning until night, and too often, Kakashi will see him hesitating to speak his mind even when there is no one else around.

Kakashi is forced to wear an eyepatch. It's not like he minds. It's even a relief sometimes, an old reminder of what he used to have. Painful, yes, sharp jolts of homesickness and guilt stinging against his breastbone, but familiar nonetheless. He takes the fabric in his hands and makes sure Hitoshi can see only his carefree grin as he slides it over his Sharingan.

The other children are wary. The adults, certainly, they're the ones who have his records after all. They fear the shinobi stuck in the child's body that radiates a certain danger their minds can't seem to handle. But the children... They don't know exactly what happened, but they still pick up on it, acting with quiet hostility in an effort to stay on top. Kakashi can't blame them – this is a miserable place, and it's all they can do to get what little they can.

Wait, no. Nevermind. He can blame them after all, because for what reason could they possibly have for picking on his precious brother? Just as they fear Kakashi, they fear Hitoshi as well. It doesn't make any sense. He may have grown out of his soft fingers and rosy cheeks, but Hitoshi is still the bright and loving boy he's always known.

Kakashi's the one with the too-old eyes and ice struck through his heart. He can't drag Hitoshi down with him.

He tries to turn things around during his therapy sessions. Wearing a mask is easy, the difficult part is picking the right one. Solemn and silent doesn't seem to be working, so he needs to try something else.

They're intimidated by the serious behaviour and shinobi-style reports so...

He pulls out his best.

"First, why don't we get to know each other better?" The therapist suggests, head tilted and body language open. "Would you tell me a bit about yourself, Shinsou-kun?"

Kakashi leans back into his chair, one arm draped across the back, and the other propped under his chin. "Maa, why not? I like eggplant miso and dogs. I dislike... people interrupting my reading. My hobbies include peaceful meditation, and my dream is to become a loyal and unassuming citizen of Japan." He makes sure to throw in a beatific smile, even though it's hidden beneath his mask.

"I... see," Chinen-sensei says slowly. "You know, you're more cheerful than I expected you to be."

"I'm just revelling in the newfound inner peace that therapy brings," Kakashi assures her.

She blinks. "We haven't even started yet."

"Ah, well best to get an early start, ne?"

Papers rustle as his therapist turns around to bring out some files. He hears her mutter under her breath, "They didn't say you'd be like *this*."

Ah, trolling. How he's missed it. It just brings so much joy to his cold, dead heart.

She readjusts herself in her seat. "Well, I'm glad you're happy to be here. Is there anything in particular you'd like to talk about?"

"Anything, hm?" Kakashi taps a finger against his mask in mock thoughtfulness. "There's not a lot of excitement to be had around here, but I suppose something did happen earlier this morning."

"Oh?"

"I personally witnessed a bit of a struggle this morning. There was a fight and they were really going at it. I had to pull them apart and give them a stern talking to."

"A fight?" Chinen's eyes widen. "That should be reported. Did you tell

anyone?"

Kakashi's mask does a good job at hiding his smile. "Ah, no, no, I had it all under control. It's hardly my first time handling such things, you know."

Her face pales. Oops. It would seem that he'd inadvertently reminded her of the actual reason he was here. That hadn't been his intention.

"You stopped the fight," she repeats. Her hands are still open, but her tone is slightly more wary than it had been initially. "How exactly did you do that?"

"I just picked them up." Kakashi says. "They were very small. I named them Naruto and Sasuke."

"...You named them?"

"They were very cute ants," Kakashi adds helpfully.

He watches with satisfied glee as several emotions flash across her face. Disbelief, exasperation, regret... Ah, he really has missed this.

"If that's all," she finally says, eyes slightly disapproving, "is there any other topic that you think we should talk about?"

"Well, actually..." He draws the word out for as long as he possibly can before shutting her down. "No."

"Really?"

"If you're interested, I have a list of trees ranked from best to worst defence against giant fireballs," Kakashi suggests. It's actually Tenzou's list. They'd gone out for drinks after a team mission, and his kouhai had gotten drunk and rambled on and on about it. Kakashi doesn't even know why he still remembers it.

"*Actually*," his therapist interrupts, "I have something I think we should talk about."

Kakashi shakes his head mournfully. "No one ever wants to hear about the trees."

She presses on. "I think we should talk about what happened at your school."

"Ah, that."

“Yes. That.”

“Well why didn’t you say so earlier?” Kakashi asks lightly. “I’m sure there’s plenty to talk about. Lots of enriching therapeutic material.”

Her lips are pursed now, and she looks down at him sternly. “I hope you’re taking this seriously. These sessions are for your benefit, and they won’t help you if you don’t let them.”

“I’ve never been more serious,” he reassures her, but she doesn’t seem to be convinced.

Chinen sighs. “Can you walk me through your thought process during the incident? What were you thinking about?”

What had he been thinking? In truth, nothing of importance. It had been a simple assessment and an even simpler decision before he’d acted. But that was hardly a civilian sort of thing. Kakashi casts his mind about. What are nice, normal, non-shinobi and non-murderous types of thoughts to be thinking about?

He’d never really interacted with that many civilians. That was normally only reserved for bodyguarding missions, which involved looking after a procession of whiny and over-anxious clients. He isn’t quite sure if he could pull that off.

What else? There was Sakura. Early, genin-days Sakura who lived with civilian parents and hadn’t been fully submerged into shinobi life just yet.

“My thought process...” Kakashi says slowly. “My uniform was completely destroyed. It got stained all over, and I never would have been able to wash it out.” That was a lie. Kakashi’s quite talented at washing blood out of fabric. “But it was ripped too. And uniforms are expensive! Imagine if I had to buy a new one, that would have been at least four books down the drain!”

“Oh. Books.” Her voice is slightly fainter than before. “What, ah, books?”

“Maa, I really shouldn’t say.” Kakashi fans his face and giggles obnoxiously.

A little over the top, maybe, but Kakashi thinks he’s nailing this. Non-shinobi, non-murderous, completely normal, if slightly infuriating civilian persona is a success! For the final touch, he makes a show of

widening his eyes. “And of course, afterwards, I took some time to reflect. I have since learned the error of my ways. I understand now that I was wrong to act as I did, being a simple civilian, and that I should have let the heroes handle it to dispose of the villain in safer and more effective ways.”

Kakashi finally looks back up. Chinen-sensei’s face is completely white, and she’s clutching tightly to her papers like he’s about to rip them out of her hands. Her eyes are wide and her muscles are completely locked up.

Ah. Perhaps his innocent civilian act needs a bit of work after all.

—

Everything starts and ends with Hitoshi. After the disastrous but still highly amusing therapy session, things go from bad to worse. It’s not *all* Kakashi’s fault. Sure people are as intimidated by him as ever, but it’s the other children that are the problem. They get it into their heads that they can blame Hitoshi for stepping out of line, and the next thing they know, their caretakers want to put a muzzle on him.

A muzzle.

And Kakashi, well. Kakashi refuses to stand for it. So they’re getting out of here. He never should have let Hitoshi come at all, but it’s too late now, which means that Kakashi will just have to work with what he has.

So he joins the Yakuza.

Well, doesn’t *join* exactly, but he does start seeking out any and all opportunities to make money, and working as a surprisingly effective errand boy and info broker does manage to net him some cash. It’s not his fault they’re unprepared for a seven-year-old with excellent stealth skills who knows how to work the underground. He uses it to his advantage. Soon, he’s amassed enough money to buy a tiny, cruddy apartment just off the side of the red-light district.

“I have a surprise for you,” he tells his brother one day. “Bring all your things and follow me.”

Hitoshi looks curious but doesn’t argue, so they pack up their meager amount of shared items side by side in silence. There’s not much – a few uniforms, socks and shoes, a book, a toothbrush. All of it goes onto their backs in their worn and ragged knapsacks.

They sneak out the back corner of the yard behind the shed. Kakashi easily scales the concrete wall, and he's proud to watch Hitoshi do the same, requiring only a tug of assistance when his strap gets caught.

The drab grey building with its bolted doors and barred windows fades out behind him. He doesn't spare it a single glance back.

As they continue walking, their surroundings become progressively sketchier. Wide, busy streets transform into narrow alleyways and cracked, dented sidewalks. Groups of narrow-eyed individuals gather on street corners, sending them suspicious glances. Houses transform into rickety apartments with collapsing staircases and heavily graffitied walls.

"Hey!" A man calls, leaning towards them. "What are a pair of kids like you doing out here by yourselves?" He's a tall, balding individual with a muscled body and spiralling tattoos down his arms. His expression isn't particularly vicious, but all the same, Kakashi leisurely lifts his shirt sleeve to reveal the curling dragon adorning the thin leather strap around his wrist. A gift from one of his contacts. The man's eyes widen, and he lets them pass without any further questioning.

Kakashi leads them further in, before stopping at a stout apartment with crumbling foundations and a dusty beige entrance.

"Here we are," he says cheerfully.

"What?" Hitoshi looks up at the building, then back at him. "What are we doing?"

Kakashi doesn't answer, but he does step up to the door and give it two sharp knocks.

There's the sound of purposeful footsteps approaching, and Kakashi backs away from the entrance. The door swings open to reveal an older woman with thinning hair and a pinched face.

"Good, you're here," she bites out. "You're late."

Kakashi nearly laughs. He's maybe fifteen minutes late at the very most. That's nothing. Still, he needs this place, and not many people would rent a room to a pair of seven-year-olds, so it's maybe best to play nice for now.

"We'd like to see the place," Kakashi tells her.

She eyes him sharply before stepping back to let them inside. "Follow me," she orders. "It's just up the stairs."

They're slow to climb the stairs, trailing after her as she leans heavily on the railing. Kakashi takes the time to better observe the place. There are another couple of apartment rooms at the bottom, but he doesn't expect the residents to be too much of a problem. When he was last here to scope it out, he'd only seen a pair of young adults and a rather anxious-looking older man. Hardly a major threat.

The construction is old and shoddy, but it's all he can afford for now, and at least it doesn't look like it will break apart from right under his feet. Dirty, yes, but still better than the child guidance centre. And while the smell isn't the best, he doesn't have his Hatake-sensitive nose anymore, so he can cope.

The light at the top of the steps flickers on jerkily as they stand at the top of the landing. The woman struggles for the key, then inserts it into the lock, light blinking back off as she does so. Kakashi idly taps the side of the wall. It sounds somewhat hollow.

When she finally gets the door open, they get a good look at their future home. Dust specks swirl lazily in the faint beams of sunlight streaming through the side window. The hallway is tight and cramped, and Kakashi has to creep around the strangely placed wall to view the singular bedroom and tiny kitchen. There's a bathroom and a small space pushed up next to the kitchen counter that could maybe hold a chair or two.

It's not great.

But there's a rusty fire escape and a good window as an emergency exit. It's away from their abusive guardians, it's private and secluded, and it's not a *complete* wreck.

Kakashi can make this work.

"Ah, this looks good." He reaches into his knapsack and sets it down on the floor, unfolding the clothing to reveal a massive wad of cash. He deposits it into the landlady's hand. "Thank you. We'll be moving in."

The woman flicks through the top few bills and then looks back up. "I see. Make sure to keep quiet on weekends, no pets, and rent should be deposited monthly. If that's all?"

“That’s all,” Kakashi agrees.

She gives him a tight smile and exits the room, closing the door behind her.

Hitoshi finally speaks, looking around the apartment in wonderment. “We’re moving in? We’re leaving the centre for good?”

“That’s right!” Kakashi says brightly. “I decided it’s about time we leave that place. We’ll be living together now, just us. More time to spend with your favourite brother, ne?”

“You’re my only brother,” Hitoshi says. His eyes are slightly teary, and Kakashi does a double take to look at him more closely. Is something wrong? The apartment is bad, but it’s not *that* terrible, is it?

“We’ll clean up,” Kakashi reassures him. “I know it’s, ah... rough, but it will look better once we do some cleaning.”

“It’s not that,” Hitoshi says. “It’s... That was a lot of money.”

“Don’t worry about the money,” Kakashi immediately responds. “I have it handled.”

His brother stares up at him for a long second. “You won’t tell me, will you.”

“Ah, well, it’s for me to know and you to... not find out!” Kakashi drops the playfulness. “Hitoshi, you don’t need to worry about it. We have a place now, and everything is just fine, okay?”

“...Okay,” Hitoshi says. “You say it’s fine, so- so everything is good.” He nods determinedly. “I guess we have to do some cleaning.” The lights flicker as he walks towards the countertop and traces his fingers through the dust. “A lot of cleaning.” He sneezes.

“Nothing but the best for my little brother!”

Kakashi leans down to prod at the floorboards, and catches the loud creaking of someone running across them to collide with his back. “Oof!”

Two arms wrap around his chest.

“Ah, Hitoshi?” He awkwardly tries to turn his head. “What’s this for?”

The arms squeeze even tighter. Fluffy, purple hair tickles the back of

his neck. Kakashi barely picks up the faintest of mumbles as Hitoshi nuzzles in closer.

“What’s that?”

“Thank you,” his brother says. “Thank you, Kashi-nii.”

Kakashi tries to play it off. It’s not like Hitoshi even knows what he’s been doing, and with any luck, he’ll never find out. “It’s no problem,” he says. “Just doing my part.”

“No,” Hitoshi interrupts. He drops the embrace and lets Kakashi turn around to face him. “*Thank you.*”

His eyes are so insistent, and although Kakashi knows his brother cares for him, he can’t help but be caught off guard by the utter emotion and adoration found in his eyes. He looks at him pleadingly, like he wants him to understand. He looks at him like he’s saying, *I love you.*

Kakashi breathes out, and ruffles his brother’s soft curls. “Of course,” he says simply. “Anytime.”

I love you too.

Chapter End Notes

Aw, Hitoshi is growing up. I’ll continue updating daily.

Heroes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hitoshi knows that his life is a bit out of the ordinary compared to his peers.

They have big, sprawling houses, and family outings. Adorable fluffy pets and homemade bento boxes. Car rides to school and parents who sign their permission slips.

But it's not like Hitoshi's lacking in any way. Sure, their apartment is pretty rundown, but why would they even need a big, fancy house when it's just the two of them? And yes, they don't go out on long family vacations, but Kakashi will sometimes bring him camping. No car rides? Who cares? Hitoshi can walk, and he's well-versed now in navigating the admittedly sketchy neighbourhood. And why would he even need a parent to make his bento boxes or sign his permission slips? Kakashi can forge signatures. Sure, he's not the best at cooking, but convenience store onigiri with henohenomoheji notes slipped in is just as thoughtful, really.

The only sad part is that they aren't allowed pets. Hitoshi really wants a cat. At least there are a lot of strays in their area.

So yes, Hitoshi knows that most other kids his age don't live by themselves. But he's still perfectly fine with it.

Besides, living on their own is so much better than what they had before. Kakashi never talks about their parents, so Hitoshi doesn't either, but he still thinks about them sometimes. He doesn't miss his father. Whenever he'd been around, Hitoshi was always scared. He doesn't think that's a normal feeling for people to have about their fathers.

As for his mother, he doesn't really think he misses her either. Still, sometimes he wonders if he'd been a better son, had a better quirk, been better, just better – would she have loved him?

Probably not. If she couldn't love Kakashi, Kakashi, who was capable and brilliant and everything Hitoshi admired, there was no way she could have ever loved him no matter how much better he was.

So they were better off. Better off than their life in the child guidance centre, that's for certain. Kakashi had never seemed that bothered, calm and confident as he always was. But for Hitoshi, it had been a miserable experience. He knows it's mostly his fault. He's the one who had used his quirk in the first place. But still! That didn't excuse the other kids for picking on him and lying about it.

And the muzzle. The *muzzle*. He tries to be like Kakashi, stoic and unbothered, but every so often he'll have nightmares about it, metal pressing into his cheeks and cold glares choking the life out of him. He'll wake up panicking and clawing at his lips, but Kakashi is always there to rub him on the back and tell him that everything is going to be okay.

Kakashi has nightmares too. He hides it well, but Hitoshi's seen him before, pawing at his Sharingan and choking down panicked breaths. Still, even when *he's* the one with the nightmares, he still ends up being the one reassuring Hitoshi.

Hitoshi used to offer to talk about it, but Kakashi is too good at changing the subject. Now, they just go to the kitchen so Hitoshi can make them both tea to calm their nerves. Apart from the nightmares, they drink a lot of tea in that kitchen during the wee hours of the morning. They're both terrible insomniacs.

Side by side, breathing in sync. Those are good nights. It's a shame that they're so rare now.

Kakashi isn't always home anymore. He used to skip school once a week and miss one or two nights at home, but now it's like he's always gone. Hitoshi comes home to apologetic notes on the counter and reminders to do his homework. It's disappointing, sure, but it's not the worst thing to arrive home to.

Once, class got dismissed due to a fire alarm, and Hitoshi had come back to his brother on the couch, cleaning out a gash on his stomach. He'd looked up at him in alarm and tried to hide it, but it was too late. Hitoshi had freaked out a little, but when Kakashi had tried to play it off, he'd made sure to extract a promise from him to tell him when he got injured.

Kakashi is stubborn. If his brother won't tell him anything and won't stop doing it, there's no convincing him otherwise. Kakashi does so much for him. The least Hitoshi can do is to be there, waiting with antiseptic, a needle and thread in his hands.

—

Hitoshi often has a hard time sleeping, and Kakashi isn't always home.

Basically, what he's trying to get at, is that he watches an insane amount of Youtube.

From cat videos to coffee reviews, indie playlists to rant accounts, he's probably seen it all. But his absolute favourite thing to watch is, you guessed it, hero videos.

There's just something about them. Shining and fierce, they declare to the world that there's evil out there, but they can beat it. They rescue the despairing; they protect the weak. They have ferocity in their eyes and they stand up for what is right.

Hitoshi knows that there's a very small chance he could become a hero. He's a future villain, after all, everyone says it, from his classmates to his teachers, to his very own mother. But he can't help but wish. Wish for success and praise, all while nurturing a secret burning desire to surpass them and prove them all wrong.

That's just a wish though. He knows it could never happen. Or he knew, until he saw that video.

It starts with grainy footage depicting a dirty alleyway. There are smashed bottles next to a beaten-down old dumpster, and puddles of muddy water pooling between cracks of asphalt. It's all blurred for a moment, the shaking camera struggling to focus, but then, there! Behind the dumpster! A group of tall individuals crowd around a frightened-looking woman. They're nudging each other, patting their backs. Hitoshi has seen this kind of situation before and he knows how this ends. The crowd gets closer, pinning her in, back against the wall when—

It happens so fast. One second there's nothing, and the next, a figure descends, dressed in all black. He swings down into the alley, white fabric heralding his arrival, and the group mutters curses, spinning around to face him head-on. A man in a faded red jacket opens his mouth, sending a sickly green substance belching out towards the new arrival. The acid is powerful, withering the already crumbling bricks, and eating right through the hero's cloth weapon. The woman screams in fear.

This is usually where the hero pulls out their quirk. Something bright and flashy, perfectly suited to hero work. Earthshaking power.

Something ostentatious to proclaim their greatness for all to see.

This one doesn't. He lands lightly on his feet, squaring himself up with perfect balance. Ducking and weaving, he evades flailing hits, and twisting in closer–

Bam! Punch straight to the jugular.

The first one crumples.

The rest of the fight is just as entrancing. While it's not the graceful and deadly movements that Kakashi has taught him, it's still engrossing, with power and deliberation behind every strike. Hitoshi watches with wide eyes and his heart caught in his throat. The second criminal is down. Then, the third. The last one sneaks up behind him and pounces from the dumpster, right hand morphing into some sort of hard metal. Hitoshi gapes and clutches at the screen, but the hero turns around in the nick of time, smoothly ducking and sending out his cloth to wrap them up like a ginormous package.

Through it all, the hero never once noticeably uses a quirk.

And then comes the best part. Once he wraps them all up and handcuffs them together, he turns to the woman. He settles down beside her, speaking a few soft words, and then slowly, gently, he rests his hand on her shoulder.

She bursts into tears and hugs him tightly.

Hitoshi has seen the video at least eleven times since. He learns later that the hero is Pro-Hero Eraserhead, an underground hero who almost never appears in the spotlight. He's quick and talented, and according to Kakashi – once Hitoshi has made him watch the video – apparently has a quirk that allows him to erase other quirks.

That's not a flashy heroic quirk. That's the kind of quirk that would get you bullied at school for sure.

Eraserhead is a hero anyway.

"I know what we should do," Hitoshi says one morning. They're sitting at the kitchen table on one of the rare days that Kakashi has decided to show up for school. "We should be heroes."

"Heroes?" Kakashi's expression twists. It's not a *bad* sort of twist, but it isn't good either. "Why do you say that?"

“Why couldn’t we be heroes?” Hitoshi sets down his chopsticks. “You’re good at fighting, and I’m getting better now too. And our quirks aren’t flashy, but they *are* useful. We could do it.”

Kakashi swallows another bite of egg, and Hitoshi politely averts his eyes. His brother scratches the side of his mask and sets his chopsticks down as well. “Ah, I’m not saying we *couldn’t* do it. But there are lots of things to do. Becoming a pop idol. Running a flower shop. Why become a hero?”

Hitoshi hesitates. Why become a hero? There are a lot of reasons he could give. He wants to disprove anyone who ever doubted them. He wants to *be better*, usurp them all. He wants to show that they’re not villains; that they can succeed despite their quirks.

But beneath all that? *Why become a hero?*

“You don’t stand by,” Hitoshi says quietly. “You protect. I- I want to do that. I want to protect people.”

And that’s what it takes to convince him. His brother’s gaze softens as he turns to him. “Then that’s what you’ll do. Hitoshi, I have full confidence that you’ll be an amazing hero.”

Hitoshi can’t help the beaming smile from spreading across his face even as he questions his brother’s phrasing. “And you too, right? You’re going to be an amazing hero too.”

“Maa, I’d rather not.”

“You’d *rather not*?”

“I’d prefer to live peacefully,” Kakashi says, turning back to his breakfast. “The life as a hero... It’s not an easy one. I’d rather get away from all that.”

“B-but, you’d be an incredible hero!” Hitoshi stutters. “You practice strategy all the time, and your quirk’s amazing, and you know all the martial arts, and you’re so smart... You’d be the *best* hero!”

Kakashi just hums and goes back to eating his eggs.

—

However unenthused his brother is about becoming a hero himself, it certainly doesn’t translate over to Hitoshi’s training. While he’s always

enjoyed training alongside his brother, he now realizes what they were doing before could hardly be called *training*. Kakashi goes all out. It seems as if he's trying to teach Hitoshi every skill he knows, no matter how obscure. It's incredibly challenging, and often Hitoshi will come home a sweaty and panting mess.

At least he finally gets a chance to throw knives.

Other skills, though, are a bit stranger.

"Do I really need to learn this?" Hitoshi asks doubtfully, as they scope out a ramen shop. "It doesn't seem very useful."

"Focus!" Kakashi insists. "Which broth is he going to get, shoyu, shio or miso?"

Hitoshi obligingly turns back to the man. He's hesitating on the corn and bean sprouts with a glance at the wavy noodles so...

"Miso?" Hitoshi guesses.

They both watch the man select the miso broth.

"Congratulations!" Kakashi chirps. "You passed!"

"I still don't see how predicting someone's ramen order is a useful skill," Hitoshi complains. "Why would I ever need to know this?"

"Don't frown on your incredible brother's life lessons." His ridiculous brother wags his finger mock-disapprovingly. "You never know what might happen! What if you need to poison someone but you only have a couple of seconds, and that prediction gives you just enough time to slip them the powder?"

"I'm not going to be poisoning anyone, Kashi-nii."

"Fine, fine. But reading people is still a very useful skill!"

"Okay, but *ramen*? It's not that important."

"Some might say that ramen is the only thing of importance," Kakashi says sagely.

"Who in the world would say that?"

Kakashi ignores him, turning back to the ramen shop. "And... next customer! Guess the noodles, thick or thin?"

And then sometimes, the skills are useful, but the teaching method leaves... something to be desired.

Hitoshi is working on his homework one evening when Kakashi snaps a pair of handcuffs around his dominant wrist, attaching him to the towel rack.

“Wha– Kashi-nii!” Hitoshi accuses, his sudden movements loudly jangling the handcuffs. “My paper is due tomorrow!”

“Better get working then!” His utter menace of a brother shoves a lockpick down the back of his shirt. “I’ll be out tonight. Ja ne!”

Apart from the occasional ridiculousness he has to put up with, Kakashi is actually a very good teacher.

“Only A’s for UA!” He’ll say, and patiently help Hitoshi work through another math problem.

Kakashi does it all. He helps him study, makes sure he completes his homework, ensures he’s always on time for school – boy, does he do that.

One night, Hitoshi makes the unwise decision to pull an all-nighter wasted on pointless, yet addictive YouTube videos. It feels like he’s just tucked himself into bed when there’s a strong tug on his ankle.

“Rise and shine!” His brother sings, eyes glittering with sadistic glee. “You don’t want to be late for school, do you?”

Hitoshi groans and pulls his leg back under the covers. “Go ‘way, Kashi.”

“Nope! Up, up, up!”

The traitorous pillow does a terrible job at masking the noise, but Hitoshi tries to make it work. Kakashi rips it right out from underneath him.

“Just one day,” Hitoshi mumbles. “No school, just sleep.”

“Ah, I see, I see,” Kakashi says, patting Hitoshi on the leg. “Then I suppose I can leave you be for now.”

There’s something about that tone of voice that would normally put Hitoshi immediately on guard. But his bed is warm and he’s still fuzzy with exhaustion, so he lets it go. It’s his mistake.

Approximately one second after he drifts off again, there's a sharp tug on his ankle. He jerks back awake, hanging upside down in an expertly constructed rope trap strung up from the ceiling.

"*Kakashi!*" Hitoshi howls, flailing wildly. The only response is the sound of muffled chuckling coming from the kitchen.

By the time he manages to free himself, Kakashi has already prepared his daily two cups of coffee. It succeeds in alleviating some of his irritation, but not all of it.

"I'm sure I could have skipped one class," he grumbles, chugging that sweet, sweet caffeine. "I already get straight As in everything. It wouldn't have made that much of a difference."

"You're the one who says that UA only takes the best of the best," Kakashi reminds him.

"*One class.*" Hitoshi glares moodily into the swirling black liquid. "You barely even show up at all."

Kakashi will pop in once or twice a week, just enough to deliver his perfect assignments or ace a test or two. His favourite thing to do though, is subtly threatening Hitoshi's classmates and teachers into playing nice with him. Hitoshi used to actually believe him when he said it was just a friendly chat, but he knows better now.

He knows better about a lot of things. Things like what Kakashi's *really* up to whenever he's off on his own.

At this point, it's obvious that his brother is definitely involved in some pretty sketchy stuff. Like, *illegal* stuff. It's the way he nods to all the burly tattooed guys on the corner, the strange packages Hitoshi sees him deliver, the numerous injuries he comes home with at night.

"You haven't been to school all week," Hitoshi continues. "Off doing your drug drops, right?"

Kakashi raises his nose, affronted. "I do no such thing."

Maybe. Probably. Hitoshi wants to believe him, but. "So what *do* you do then? I know it's sketchy – just tell me. I'm not upset, I could—" He hesitates, but forges on. "I could help?"

Kakashi's eyes widen, before he sighs heavily. "It's nothing for you to worry about, Hitoshi. You have your school and training! Lots of work

to do to get into UA. That's all you should be focusing on, okay?"

Homework and straight A's, while Kakashi, the real genius, barely skims by. Fitness and training, while Kakashi's probably out fighting on the streets. Scrounging up money for books and coffee, while Kakashi works for their food and shelter.

It isn't fair that his brother does so much for him. Hitoshi wishes he could pay him back somehow. He turns towards Kakashi to protest further, beg him for answers, promise his help—

"Hitoshi. Please."

And that's enough to make him relent. He can't say no to his brother's tired eyes that plead him not to push it any further. Kakashi wants to protect him. Sometimes it feels like that's his *only* desire.

This is your childhood, Hitoshi.

Hitoshi wants to help his brother, but if protecting him is the only thing Kakashi wants, how can Hitoshi deny him?

"You're going to help me with my application tonight, right? It's due soon so you have to be home."

He's rewarded with a thankful glance and a warm hand in his hair. "Of course. Only the best for our future hero!"

Yes, Kakashi's just like that. So Hitoshi lets him take care of the finances, fuss about his homework and make sure he gets to school on time. They keep training, and Hitoshi's skills improve every day. Soon enough, it's graduation, his application is sent in, and then, and then—

"Have a good entrance exam!" Kakashi tells him, tucking an extra knife into his jacket pocket. "Keep calm and don't mess up!"

Hitoshi pulls a face. "Keep calm and don't mess up? What kind of advice is that?"

"Wise advice," Kakashi informs him. He places a hand on Hitoshi's shoulder. "Are you ready?"

"I—" Hitoshi takes a breath. Breathes in. Breathes out. "Yes. I'm ready."

"Then that's that. You're ready. You can do this, Hitoshi."

He can do this. *He can do this.* Hitoshi walks forward and takes his

first steps towards his future.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the childhood arc over. We're moving into the canon timeline now. Hello UA!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His brother is actually *surprised* to find out he got into the hero course.

Kakashi isn't. He has a fairly good grasp on this world by now, and he's seen the civilians around here. School until *eighteen*, exercise maybe thrice a week, no training, no tactics, no nothing.

And Hitoshi, well. Hitoshi has had a personal prep course training directly under someone who used to be Konoha's very best ANBU captain. It's no wonder that he got in.

Not that Kakashi's arrogant enough to believe it's *all* because of him. Hitoshi has been more than a model student. He's enthusiastic, keen to learn, and committed to his goals. Kakashi's watched him improve every day and demonstrate his talent in skills even Kakashi might find slightly challenging. And yes, even though the old hero worship has faded into something a little more exasperated and grumbly, Hitoshi is still as dedicated and hardworking as ever.

Kakashi couldn't be more proud.

He tells him so, and watches his brother flush with pride.

"I didn't really think I'd make it," Hitoshi admits breathlessly. "I mean, I know I've trained for this forever, but it's just- I'm really-" He clutches the letter to his chest and then sets it back down again, running his fingers over it in awe.

"I mean, I know I took down a lot of them, but I kept seeing all these other kids- did I tell you about the explosions kid? He was taking those robots down like dominos." Hitoshi shakes his head. "I didn't even know about the hero points. That's really what saved me."

Hero points. It's an interesting concept. Konoha had never really had such a thing, but at the same time, it was similar to Kakashi's own standards for the bell test. Help your teammates. Work together. Kakashi approves.

"You passed because you deserved it," Kakashi says firmly. "That test was excessively tailored towards those with destructive powers, and

you did your best despite that. The fact that you still took the time to help others just goes to show that you're meant to be there. As I said before, I'm proud of you, Hitoshi."

Hitoshi finally stops running his fingers over the sheet's crisply printed lettering. "I- I know. Thank you."

They spend the rest of the time prepping for school. Kakashi's pretty satisfied with their financial situation, as he's taken a good number of missions and other paying jobs, as well as his status as one of the neighbourhood's most elusive info brokers. They have the cash. This means that he can take Hitoshi on a shopping spree to get him all his necessary school supplies and a good deal of not-so-necessary things along with it.

"A portable coffee flask with cat ears," Hitoshi says, eyeing said item. "Why would I need that?"

"You love cats," Kakashi cajoles. "And you love coffee! It's a match made in heaven!"

"I already have a water bottle," Hitoshi points out. His gaze is softening though and his lips are curling up into a tiny grin, meaning he actually does want it. All that's needed is for Kakashi to give the right push.

"It's insulated and it will keep things warm for up to eight hours! And it says it's completely leakproof. You can bring it to class, bring it on patrol..."

"It's over 3000 yen."

"Don't worry about the money," Kakashi insists. "It's not a problem. And besides, this is my celebration treat! You're going to UA! Don't you want to have the coolest gear?"

"Cool with my cat ears and whiskers flask?" Hitoshi takes the flask, before shaking his head. "You're right, it's adorable. Okay. We'll get it. Thanks, Kashi-nii."

Kakashi smiles victoriously, before something else catches his eye. "Ah, we can't forget these!" He pops a box full of trackers into the cart. He'll have to do a couple of modifications before he puts them to use, but at least they look fairly good quality.

"Trackers?" Hitoshi pulls a face. "And just what do you plan on doing

with those?"

Kakashi tweaks his ear. "Well for one, you're in need of a tracker or two."

Hitoshi eyes him dubiously. "Don't you already have a tracker on me?"

Yes, he does, but Hitoshi shouldn't know that. Kakashi keeps his face perfectly guileless and still, and watches as his brother finally snorts and breaks eye contact.

"You know, UA supplies everyone with their equipment along with their costumes. They have the whole support department for that."

"Mm, and I'll be checking over all your costuming and equipment from them. But it never hurts to be over-prepared."

They check out their items and carry the veritable mountain of school supplies and various other knickknacks home.

Not home for much longer, though. It's a fast process to transfer Hitoshi's items into his new apartment. It's smaller, but nicer too, with clean tiled floors and spotless countertops. Although Kakashi is not entirely pleased to have his brother leaving his side, he realizes it's probably time. Fifteen is practically an adult, and it will be good for Hitoshi to start gaining a little more independence.

Not that Kakashi will leave him alone completely.

"You're moving to Mustafu too? Right, of course you are. I should have known." His brother's tone sounds exasperated, but the relieved smile on his face reveals his true feelings. "Are we moving the rest to your apartment, then?"

"No need, I'll do it."

Hitoshi narrows his eyes. "It's an okay place, right?"

"Yes, yes, it's very nice."

He huffs. "Well, remember to invite me over once you move in, okay?" His brother glances at him out of the corner of his eye, a faint tinge of worry flickering across his face. "And, well, I know you're just moving to Mustafu for me, but you should find something. Something you like. Something relaxing or fun to do. You need something for

you, Kashi-nii.”

Something for him, hm? Kakashi doesn’t often take a lot of time for fun or relaxation. He’s always running errands, finding jobs, interfering with crime. And even though he has no intention of becoming a hero, he’d never let his skills get rusty. The rest of his free time is either spent on Hitoshi or training.

Although his initial reason for not becoming a hero had been the simple fact that he would never make a good one, his desire to live a peaceful life still stood. Perhaps Hitoshi was onto something by suggesting he find a fun, relaxing pastime.

Hmm.

—

Time really flies. It seems like he’s barely blinked and then all of a sudden he’s out walking Hitoshi to the train station.

“My favourite little brother,” he coos. “Finally leaving the nest!”

“I’m your only brother,” Hitoshi says.

“Flying off on his own,” Kakashi continues dramatically. “And leaving his poor older brother behind.”

Hitoshi shakes his head and tightens his grip around his bag. “We’re twins.”

Kakashi’s not *really* worried. He’s not. If he were *actually* worried, there would be absolutely no way he’d ever let Hitoshi go off all by himself. But he’s not. It’s fine. Still, Kakashi has always had his brother around, right by his side, all the better to properly protect him. So it is a bit strange to finally be separated.

What if Hitoshi gets bullied? What if there’s a freak accident? What if there’s a *villain attack*?

Well, there probably won’t be a villain attack, but he can do his best to at least mitigate his more minor concerns.

“Text me when you get there,” he orders, “and don’t damage the tracker. It’s in your jacket pocket lining.”

“I knew it!” His brother exclaims. “I knew it was suspicious when you told me you *accidentally ripped* my blazer.”

Kakashi smiles brightly. “A happy coincidence, I’m sure.”

Hitoshi scoffs. “Yeah. I’m sure.” He rubs the side of his face. “So. This is it.”

This is it. His brother is leaving.

“Off to UA to dazzle the world and show off your heroic prowess!”

“Yeah.” Hitoshi hesitates, then darts forward to give him a short hug. “Love you, Kashi-nii. Bye.”

Kakashi noogies his head and watches his brother squirm in distress, backing off to try and fix his hair. “Go and make some friends!”

Hitoshi gives one last desperate rake through his hair before turning back to him. “I will. Bye, Kashi-nii!” He turns away and gives one last long backward glance before finally getting on the train. The doors start to close.

“I know you will!” Kakashi calls after him. “Don’t worry, I’ll go email them all to make sure they play nice! Anyone who wrongs you will be punished!”

Through the sliding glass, his brother’s eyes widen accordingly. “Kashi- wha- No! Kakashi, *don’t!*”

Kakashi waves cheerfully as the train pulls away.

—

On a quiet street on the edge of downtown Mustafu, is a small store with wide glass windows and a cheery green door. A carved wooden sign proclaims the store’s name in large letters: ‘Mokuton Flowers’.

Kakashi is in the back of the shop, carefully spritzing the leaves of Mr. Ukki 2.0 when he hears the bells jingle. He peeks through the tinted glass window and grins as he spies a familiar head of purple hair.

His brother stands awkwardly in the middle of the shop, clutching a small pink piece of cardstock in his left hand. “Hello?”

It’s good to practice situational awareness, and Kakashi is always happy to help. He creeps out the side entrance and winds around the far side of the wall.

Hitoshi has apparently given up on looking for a store worker. He

shuffles down the middle aisle and tries to duck out of the way of the reaching ferns. “Goldenrod,” he mutters. “Goldenrod and gladiolus...” He steps around a pot and reaches the fridges filled with more traditional flowers.

“Yo,” Kakashi says, stepping out from behind the orchids.

“Ka- Ack!” Kakashi watches in amusement as his brother nearly trips over the pot. “Stop sneaking up on me!”

He taps Hitoshi’s forehead. “Pay better attention to your surroundings.”

“I do, you’re just a freaking stealth expert!” He turns around. “What are you doing here? *What are you wearing?*”

Kakashi pouts. “What, you don’t like it?” He spreads his arms to better show off the utter monstrosity he’s chosen. It’s an eye-watering pink apron with bright cheery flowers on the pockets. He went out and bought a neon pink mask just to pair with it.

“It’s atrocious,” Hitoshi says bluntly.

Kakashi places a hand over his heart. “Such hurtful words from my very own brother.”

“Stop being such a drama queen.” Hitoshi wags the business card in Kakashi’s face. “Why are you here? And what are the flowers for? Did you really need my help for delivering a bouquet?”

“They’re for you, of course!” Kakashi happily informs him. “I thought they would add a little colour to your apartment. And as for why I’m here... Welcome to *Mokuton Flowers!* My very own flower shop!”

Hitoshi gapes at him. “Wait... are you actually being serious? I thought you were just wearing the apron to mess with me.”

Yes, he *has* seriously opened a flower shop. Although it’s also true that he’s mainly wearing the apron to mess with Hitoshi, not that he’ll admit it. “Would I do such a thing?” He asks, mock-hurtfully.

“Yes,” Hitoshi replies immediately, before doing another scan of the shop. “So, this is your place. You’re- you’re a florist now.”

“That’s right!”

Hitoshi looks at him and apparently sees something in his eyes,

because his face softens. “This seems great. Very relaxing. And a good career! I’m glad you found something, Kashi-nii.”

Kakashi hasn’t fully given up on his other activities yet. The flower shop is also a cover for some of his deals and info-broking base, but he doesn’t want to disappoint his brother.

“Ah, thank you. I’m glad too.” He turns towards the fridge and starts gathering the flowers. Azaleas for family, as well as a general warning for caution, goldenrod for encouragement... He picks all his chosen flowers and bundles them together, tying them up tightly with a small bow at the base. “Here you go!”

Hitoshi examines the bouquet, semi-amused. “Oh, yeah. Thanks.”

Kakashi leans over the counter. “So, how are classes? Are you making friends? Did you need me to come talk to the explosions kid?”

“First, *absolutely not*, the emails were bad enough. Do you have any idea how many people I’ve had come up to me to try and get on my good side? *Over thirty people*, Kakashi, which is thirty more than I ever would have wanted. And I didn’t want to tell them about you, so I had to make things up, and let me tell you, it’s *not ideal*.”

Kakashi snorts and tries to cover it up with a cough when his brother turns to glare at him.

“Classes are fine, I guess, but I don’t know about *friends*, exactly. People ask me to spar sometimes, but they keep underestimating me. It’s really annoying. Everyone goes super easy on me all the time, and it’s actually pretty patronizing.”

Going easy on *Hitoshi*? Kakashi doubts it. He hums. “Maybe they’re not going easy. Maybe you’re just that good.”

Hitoshi makes a face. “I’ve never beaten you *once*.” He shakes his head. “Anyway, why do you need to know all this? It’s not like there’s anything new. You called me like two days ago.”

Kakashi hangs his head morosely. “But I suffer with even a single day apart.”

His brother rolls his eyes, but still proceeds to tell him about his class and his lessons. Kakashi just leans back. He closes his eyes and lets the chatter wash over him, listening to his brother’s excitement at finally being on the path to achieving his dreams.

—

Kakashi never intended on becoming a vigilante.

Really, he didn't. But when he saw a mugging occurring in a dark alleyway, it was such a trivial thing to step in. *You don't stand by*, he'd told his brother once, so he doesn't. It's easy and rewarding, and if he happened to come across a crime or two while out on errands, he'd usually take the time to stop it.

That's how he got his start. It suited him just fine for a little while, but as things went on, Kakashi started getting restless.

He trained every day, but training was just that. *Training*. He never even got to participate in a proper spar. Coaching Hitoshi was fulfilling but not physically challenging, and although they would occasionally practice using their abilities on each other, Kakashi knew he wasn't using his to its full extent. If he continued on the way he was, he'd be left with mere muscle memory with no skill to use it. And that was simply unacceptable.

So he stepped things up. It wasn't like he went out looking for fights, but he was slightly more active in his search for a challenge. He tested out his quirk; he protected people from the shadows. Fights were harder, but hardly endangering, thanks to the capabilities of his Sharingan. Still, he kept things quiet. He didn't want to risk drawing too much attention, lest he put himself and Hitoshi at risk.

Now though? Hitoshi's at UA, living in a separate apartment halfway across the city. And although Kakashi is busy with his new flower shop and forging new connections for his information network, a familiar restlessness still creeps back up on him.

It's a relaxing job, he reminds himself, as he arranges a bouquet.

I can finally rest, he thinks, after a sedate info exchange at the back of the shop.

A peaceful life, he pleads to himself, as he tends to his plants.

Some things are not to be. When a gang skirmish breaks out, even with absolutely no intention of getting involved, he still finds himself in a warehouse at three in the morning, cleaning blood off his knives. There are three bodies strewn across the cold cement.

Once a shinobi, always a shinobi. He can't keep doing this.

He cleans up the evidence without any trouble and retreats back to his apartment to think, holding his head in his hands. Even though he yearns for peace, his body calls furiously for action. He wants his flower shop, and he wants his domestic life with Hitoshi. He needs to make money, but he doesn't want to become a hired killer once more. Still, he can't outrun his past. At his heart, he's an assassin and a fighter, and he can't keep those instincts repressed forever.

There must be a solution.

He buys a blank white mask and red paint the very next night.

If he's really going to do this, he's going to do it right. Kakashi scopes out hero patrol routes; he watches the police. He makes sure to resupply his weapons stash, attempting to get his hands on anything of the slightest quality under the sun. He finds a proper uniform, and he develops a good cover for his quirk, a balance manipulation ability that can cause people to trip and fall.

Most of all, he creates rules for himself. This vigilante stint is for training. Training and helping people, that's all it is. That's why the vigilante persona that he's creating will be entirely nonlethal. Although a major reason behind this is to avoid the heat that a lethal vigilante would surely bring, there are other deeper reasons. He's in a new world now, and he needs to change with it. Kakashi certainly doesn't agree with all their morals, but he can do his best to try and adapt. He refuses to spiral.

Kakashi has everything under control.

—

"Did you hear about what happened with that vigilante last night?" A boy with bright yellow hair with a black zigzagging streak asks loudly. "Their name is Hound, doesn't that sound cool? I heard they got a villain to trip right into a trash can!"

His brother snorts and mutters something under his breath.

"What did you say?" The other boy asks.

"Nothing," Hitoshi says hastily. There's an odd expression twisting across his face. Sad almost, or maybe even slightly bittersweet. "I saw the article too. He saved that mother and her kid."

"Yeah!" The blond boy bounces up and down. "I know vigilantes are

illegal, but man, they're pretty cool!"

"Yeah," Hitoshi agrees quietly. "Yeah. They were, uh. Heroic."

As amusing as it should be to hear his little brother speculating about his alternate identity, this is just making him uncomfortable. Kakashi takes advantage of the conversational lull to swoop in.

"Vigilantes, hm?" Kakashi questions brightly, plopping himself in between the two. "That seems like a dangerous thing to admire, hero course student-kun!"

The blond student yelps and nearly stumbles over his feet. "Ah! Where did you come from?"

His brother is more quick to conceal his surprise, but Kakashi still catches the suspicious gleam that flickers across his face. He examines Kakashi's dyed brown hair, painted face, and stolen uniform. "You're a support course student. What's your name?"

"Sukea, nice to meet you! And you?"

"Kaminari Denki," the blond says. "And, really? It's just Sukea?"

"Just Sukea," Kakashi agrees. He gestures at Hitoshi. "Are you friends with Purple-kun, here?"

Hitoshi's eyes narrow into a glare even as Kaminari's grin widens. "Yeah, we're friends! Shinsou-kun's super badass. He's like the best martial artist in the class."

"Really?" Kakashi affects a look of shock and makes a show of shuffling nervously. "Ah, well I suppose I wouldn't want to mess with him, then!"

Kaminari laughs and hits him affectionately on the shoulder. "You hear that, Shinsou? Nobody wants to mess with *you*!"

"Even though he does look like a grump," Kakashi continues on, "who probably doesn't get enough sleep—"

"You know what?" Hitoshi interrupts abruptly. "Lunch is almost over. You should go to class, Kaminari. I'll meet you there."

"Go to—" Kaminari looks between the two of them. "I mean, we can just go together—?"

"I think I left my phone in the cafeteria," Hitoshi lies blandly. The slim bulge of his cell phone is obvious from where Kakashi is standing. "I'll just be a minute."

"Oh, okay man! I'll see you there!" The boy scurries off.

"Ahaha." Kakashi scratches the back of his head. "I should probably be off too—"

His brother whips around and jabs his finger into his chest. "Cut it out. I know it's you."

Well, looks like the jig is up. Kakashi drops the nervous, overly excitable air and settles back into his usual slouch. "Well. He doesn't seem too bright."

"Why are you stalking me?" Hitoshi looks like he wants to rip his hair out.

"Maa, maa, calm down. I'm just popping in to say hi."

"Hi." He looks from side to side. "You should leave before someone figures out you're not supposed to be here."

Kakashi affects a tearful expression. "I can't believe you would think so little of me. Besides, I'm *Sukea*, here." He runs a hand through his curling brown locks.

"It was a good disguise," Hitoshi says begrudgingly. "But still! Did you seriously just sneak in to listen to me talk with my classmate?"

"Your *friend*," Kakashi croons.

"Classmate. I barely know him. He just likes to chat."

"About vigilantism, hm? Interesting topic."

"Oh. Yeah." Hitoshi shifts. "It's. Uh. An interesting path. They could have been a hero, but instead..."

Could have been a hero, ha.

"But instead they're an immoral and reckless rule breaker." Kakashi shakes his head. "For shame."

"I don't think that," Hitoshi blurts. "I think... maybe they really could have been a hero, but they just didn't have the option. Maybe they

wanted to, but there was no choice.”

Kakashi eyes his brother speculatively. “Well...” he says slowly, “it’s nice of you to empathize, Hitoshi, but I don’t think you need to worry about them. You’re here, you know. You faced a lot of pushback, but you made it, and the top in combat too! You show it *is* possible, so you shouldn’t worry about it, ne?” He ruffles his brother’s hair.

Hitoshi’s mouth flattens. “That wasn’t... never mind.” He sighs and pushes Kakashi off. “You should really go.”

Kakashi peers at his brother. He seems more subdued, but not too down, so that’s a success at least. “Go study hard! Talk to your friends!”

“Go!” Hitoshi orders.

“I’m going, I’m going!”

Chapter End Notes

The flower shop au has my heart <3
Daily updates continue.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As soon as the giant brainy monster shows up, Hitoshi *knows* they're in trouble.

Wait, actually no. He knew they were in trouble the second the portal first appeared. One minute Thirteen is covering the dangers of unsafe quirk usage, the next, a giant freaking wormhole opens up in the middle of the training grounds.

"Has the training started already?" One of his classmates asks.

Hitoshi grits his teeth. It's not training, that much is obvious considering the looks on their teachers' faces. Besides, even if it is training, you always take it seriously. No point in practicing for the real thing if you don't treat it that way.

Still, every single instinct in his body is screaming at him to get as far away as possible, so that's what he does, subtly backing up to position himself just out of line of sight.

It's a good thing too. The next instant, a whole squadron of villains starts emerging from the portal. They're led by a pale-haired man with hands plastered across his body and a psychotic look in his eyes, who Hitoshi immediately clocks as bad news. He's proven right when the villain starts ranting about All Might and the destruction of hero society. And then suggests killing off his classmates.

Yeah, no way. Hitoshi has absolutely no intention of letting that happen.

He's trained for villain attacks, but apart from that one time eight years ago, he's never been *directly* in danger before. While his brother frequently went overboard to imitate all sorts of disaster scenarios, Kakashi would never have let him get truly hurt. So that just means he needs to get this right. No second chances.

As Kakashi says: *Keep calm and don't mess up.*

The frequencies of their communication equipment are jammed, so there's no way to contact anyone. Hitoshi starts analyzing the group of

villains, just as Kakashi had made him simulate dozens of times before. There's the hand guy, who is obviously the leader here. He looks like he'd be easy to piss off, which is always a good thing for Hitoshi and his quirk. The rest are probably mooks, but it never hurts to be careful. What they don't have in strategy and lineup, they *do* have in numbers, his quirk's greatest weakness.

Brainwash relies heavily on the element of surprise. He'll need to pick his chance wisely.

Aizawa orders them to evacuate, but Hitoshi purses his lips. It's not going to be that easy.

"But there's too many of them for you to fight alone!" Midoriya cries. "Your quirk is best for stealth and one-on-one battles. It's not going to help you here!"

"You can't be a pro if you only have one trick," Aizawa growls.

It's true that Eraserhead is a supremely talented physical fighter and strategist, and Hitoshi admires him more than anything. But Midoriya is right. This is a whole horde of villains. Aizawa, much like Hitoshi, suffers from the limitations of his own quirk. This is not a good matchup for him.

He throws himself into the fray anyway. There's no other choice. Unfortunately, that's about when Shadow Head shows up, declares himself as Kurogiri, a member of the so-called League of Villains, and then promptly creates a giant portal to warp all his classmates away.

In battle situations, you have to think fast. As the portal forms, Hitoshi rapidly runs through his options. One, stick with his classmates. Two, stay with his teacher. Sticking with his classmates might be a good idea, as strength in numbers would be their greatest advantage against such a large group. It would also ensure that no one is left behind, on their own without any backup. However, the situation is likely to get chaotic and difficult to control. As for his other option, while Aizawa is competent and able to protect himself, he might need the trump card that Hitoshi would be able to bring.

What's the best choice? What's the quickest way to resolve this without his class getting hurt?

Through the crowd of bodies, Hitoshi once again catches sight of the leader's eyes, dilated and glowing with bloodlust.

That's what he needs to do. Take out the leader. The leader and that teleporter, and then they stand a chance.

Hitoshi remains hidden even as the portal snaps shut, taking the majority of his classmates with it. Now all that's left is Iida, Uraraka, Shoji and Thirteen.

"You need to run, Iida," the hero commands. "Let them know what's happening. Go get help!"

Iida seems indecisive, torn between going for aid and remaining to fight with the rest of them. "I am training to be a hero," he says hesitantly. "It would be disgraceful for me to leave you—"

"Go," Hitoshi snaps. "You can't be a hero if we all die."

Iida's eyes widen before he abruptly nods and starts running.

"I'm afraid I cannot let you go just yet," the shadowy teleporter declares, and Thirteen squares up, ready to fight.

The next few minutes pass in a blur of combat. Hitoshi doesn't use his quirk just yet, but he does make use of all the tricks his brother has taught him, dirty or otherwise, in order to hold his own against the crowd of villains. All while fending them off, he keeps his eyes fixed on the leader, who is gleefully surveying the chaos like a king overlooking his kingdom. Eraserhead is fighting hard, attempting to make his way over to the center of the plaza.

Hitoshi could stay with his classmates, support them in their fight. But... his eyes once again drift towards the leader. Danger, instability, immense power. This man radiates it. He can't just leave that alone.

His classmates seem to be doing fine. They'll be okay. Probably. Hitoshi chooses to disengage, and slips away, sneaking towards his teacher.

He arrives just in time to hear the man figuring out Aizawa's quirk. "Don't push yourself," he whispers. "You might just fall apart."

Pale twisted fingers reach forward with surprising speed and latch themselves onto Aizawa's elbow. His teacher retreats, letting out a grunt of shock and pain. Hitoshi tries to get a better look. He used a quirk, he must have. Is it bad? What did it do? As Aizawa clutches at his limb, pressing his fingers to the injured flesh, it cracks and blackens, before simply... *falling apart*.

Hitoshi reels. A touch-based quirk. A touch-based quirk that causes instantaneous disintegration on contact. He swallows. It's powerful, true, but he can still do this. He just needs to stay out of range.

He runs through all his possible courses of action and prepares to speak—

“By the way, hero,” the leader says, raspy and grating. “I am not the final boss.”

What the fuck. *What the fuck.* A hulking monster with rippling muscular limbs, dense midnight black flesh and a fully exposed brain sticking out of its skull crashes into being. Hitoshi's incredulous gaze travels up as he takes in the massive being towering over his teacher. It grins, toothy and dumb, with no light in its eyes.

“Nomu,” the man orders. “Take him down.”

The monster comes down on Aizawa like a tidal wave upon the shore. His teacher gasps wetly, thudding into the cracked cement. Hitoshi can't let this go on. He can't.

“Nomu!” Hitoshi yells, stepping out of his hiding spot. “Stop!”

The monster doesn't respond to his call, still pinning Aizawa with one single gigantic paw, but the leader does, malevolent gaze snapping directly towards Hitoshi.

“You idiot!” He laughs. “Nomu is a bioengineered anti-Symbol of Peace, programmed specifically to only listen to me!”

Got you. Hitoshi's lips curl up into a smirk.

“Shinsou,” his teacher orders, voice tight with pain. “Get out of here!”

Hitoshi is not generally a rule breaker by choice. Most of the time, he tries to go along and follow orders like a good, obedient citizen. But he can't do that here. Everyone is in danger, so he has to help.

“Are you sure *you're* not the idiot?” Hitoshi needles, pulling out his most obnoxious whine. “Considering you just told me everything I need to know?”

The villain's nostrils flare, mouth opening, but at that moment, Kurogiri teleports in, appearing in another portal of swirling black. “Shigaraki Tomura,” he says, and Hitoshi commits the name to

memory. “We must depart. Although I attempted to hold them off and put the rescue hero out of commission, one of the students still managed to escape the facility.”

Out of commission. Thirteen is out of the fight, whether dead or simply unconscious, Hitoshi doesn’t know.

Shigaraki growls like a rabid dog. “If you weren’t our warp gate, I’d tear every last atom of your body apart. Whatever. We can’t win against a bunch of pros. Let’s go.”

Go? It’s a relief, but Hitoshi still can’t keep his body from tensing.

“But first,” Shigaraki says, a menacing grin spreading across his face, “let’s send a message to the symbol of peace. Let’s break his pride. Why don’t we leave a couple of corpses behind?”

His eyes slide towards Hitoshi.

His heart is pounding with red, hot blood, but in his head, everything suddenly feels ice cold. Shigaraki’s emitting real killing intent, there’s no mistaking it. His grin widens, and Hitoshi knows this man will gleefully bathe in rivers of red to achieve his goals.

His classmates are in trouble. Aizawa has ordered him not to engage, but heroes *don’t stand by*.

The leader, and the teleporter. The leader’s the real threat, but the teleporter is just as deadly, along with being their only mode of transport. He needs to take them both out. But Shigaraki is the one controlling the Nomu. Hitoshi needs to make a decision, he needs to *do something*—

“Please,” Hitoshi sneers, wrapping arrogance around him like a cloak. Get him to engage. Get him to *respond*. “You think you stand a chance against *All Might*?”

“*You*—” Shigaraki snarls, and Hitoshi lets the thread dangle—

“*Run, Shinsou!*” Aizawa demands, still attempting to struggle out from under the beast’s muscular hand.

Shigaraki’s gaze snaps back to Aizawa, as if just remembering his presence. A psychotic gleam sparks into his eyes, and Hitoshi suddenly knows that if he lets him go on, his teacher will not live to see another day. He needs to act. *He needs to act now*.

Shigaraki's mouth opens, and forms the word, "*Nomu*—"

"Use your quirk to take out Kurogiri."

The leader's eyes gloss over in an instant, like foamy film over a tempestuous sea. He turns and immediately takes off, outstretched hands reaching for the teleporter, who barely manages to flinch back in time. The white of his shirt crumples into ashes. Shigaraki reaches again, fingers brushing, and Hitoshi grits his teeth as the hand emerges three feet away, coming out through a hastily made portal. The teleporter spares a single glance at Hitoshi, yellow eyes flashing, before the two disappear in a swirl of black void.

Hitoshi clenches his fists, running forward—

"HAVE NO FEAR! BECAUSE I... AM HERE!"

—

"And what exactly led you to make that decision?"

Hitoshi shifts in place. He's normally unbothered by the hard plastic of the classroom chairs, but for some reason, he's feeling remarkably uncomfortable at the moment. Even though they're just sitting in an empty classroom, the atmosphere calls to mind a long, dark hallway and an interrogation room door. His eyes nervously dart around the room.

Detective Tsukauchi, Aizawa, Principal Nezu and *All Might* all gaze back at him.

Calm. He needs to stay calm. It's just an after-action report, that's all. He closes his eyes and imagines it's Kakashi here with him, asking him to detail the reasons behind his choices for the latest practice scenario.

"Shigaraki was clearly a threat, and he directly stated that he was going to kill people. We were all in danger. He definitely would have killed me, and probably Midoriya and Asui as well. Besides, he was the only one who could command the Nomu, which we weren't capable of fighting. I needed to take him out. Aizawa-sensei wasn't capable of movement, and I acted right before Shigaraki was about to call the Nomu to kill him." Hitoshi looks at his teacher, attempting to hide a grimace. "I know you told me to leave, and I'm sorry I didn't listen, but the best option to prevent casualties was to use my quirk and take the most powerful villains out."

The principal, perched on top of the desk, folds his paws behind his back. “And so that’s when you ordered Shigaraki to attack Kurogiri.”

“Yes.”

“You’re very lucky Kurogiri was able to redirect the blow,” All Might says gravely. “You could have killed him.”

Hitoshi pauses, caught off guard. “I... know?” *That was why he did it.*

The adults exchange looks. Something grave and weighty passes between them. Hitoshi feels cold.

Tsukauchi sighs. “Shinsou-kun,” he says heavily. “Did you mean to kill Kurogiri?”

Yes, Hitoshi wants to say. *Obviously.* Both of them were major threats. Hitoshi’s *Brainwash* isn’t a guaranteed win– too many things can snap his control. He needed Shigaraki to be silenced, and he needed Kurogiri to be down for the count. Killing Kurogiri was the best way to protect himself and his class.

It seems obvious. He was protecting his class. Putting the villains down quickly and putting them down *hard* was the only way he could guarantee everyone’s safety.

He could say all that. But looking into his teachers’ eyes...

He holds his tongue.

“Shinsou,” Aizawa says, hard stare drilling directly into him.

Hitoshi swallows. “I was protecting myself and the class.”

“We understand,” Nezu responds. “Nevertheless, we’d still like you to answer the question. When you made that command, did you deliberately set out to kill the villain known as Kurogiri?”

Is there a right answer to this? Why does it seem like a trick question?

“I did,” Hitoshi says slowly. It feels like he’s digging his own grave.

There’s another round of heated glances. Tsukauchi sets his hat down. All Might looks like someone slapped him across the face.

“Shinsou,” Aizawa starts. His lips are firmly pressed together, and his brow is furrowed. “You do realize that killing is wrong.”

“Yes, I realize that killing is ethically wrong,” Hitoshi says. He’s trying not to let the faint sarcastic edge slip into his voice, but he doesn’t think he’s succeeding.

“But you chose to do so anyway,” Nezu points out.

Are they serious? “I was protecting my classmates.” He turns towards Aizawa and very carefully does not raise his voice. “I was protecting *you*.”

“I am your teacher.” Aizawa’s voice is hard. “And you are a *student*. It’s not your job to be protecting me, in fact, it’s my responsibility to look after *you*. Besides, you’re still required to obey my orders when I give them.”

“But you were—”

“Young Shinsou,” All Might says gravely. “While the urge to come to your teacher’s defence is admirable, your methods were unbecoming of a future hero.”

Hitoshi’s mouth clacks shut.

“You wish to become a hero?”

Mutely, he nods.

“Listen well, young Shinsou. As a hero, you must take ultimate responsibility for the lives that you touch. You have the power, and everyone will rely on you. This means that you must uphold what is right and just in this world. Heroes do their very best to prevent the loss of lives. *All lives*. If we stopped caring about such a thing, we would be no different from the villains we fight.” His earnest blue gaze bores into Hitoshi’s soul. “We must be better.”

Hitoshi had numerous arguments swirling around in his head, but upon receiving the full weight of the Number One Hero’s attention, they all seem to have fizzled away. His mouth feels dry. He doesn’t know how to respond. The only thing he can think to say—

“You don’t stand by,” Hitoshi whispers. “When people are in danger, you protect them with everything you have.”

“It is your duty to protect,” All Might agrees. “To protect *everyone*. That is what being a hero is.”

Hitoshi closes his eyes as everything he thought he knew shatters like glass.

—

Hitoshi is leaving through the front door of the building when Aizawa catches up to him.

“Kid,” he starts.

Hitoshi breathes out and turns back around. His teacher is standing there, bandages wrapped across his elbow and ribs, and face still incredibly serious.

His brain isn’t working right now. He doesn’t want to have this conversation again, but his teacher is still here, so he needs to say something.

“Did you want something else?” He blurts. *And...* that came out incredibly rude. Fuck. His brain is dead. He tries to backtrack. “I mean– I didn’t mean it like that. Was there something else you wanted to talk about, sensei?”

“Shinsou,” he says again. “You have a lot of promise as a hero. And I think... you’re a good kid. But taking a life? That’s not a path you want to go down. It’s not something you can ever take back.”

Hitoshi just nods. He feels drained, and he can’t seem to muster any more emotion.

Aizawa shifts, before clearing his throat. “But... I know you were under a lot of pressure, and you believed I could have died. Your reaction was understandable. Not *right*, but understandable.”

Hitoshi nods again.

“You’ll just have to do better next time.”

“Yes, sensei,” he says.

Aizawa sighs, but drops the topic. “Do you have someone coming to pick you up?” He asks instead.

“I take the train,” Hitoshi says dully.

“Today was an extremely intense event. It would be better to have someone to come and get you.”

“It’s fine.”

“If you’re sure. I can—”

“Bye, sensei.” Hitoshi starts walking.

“One last thing,” Aizawa says loudly, and Hitoshi’s head snaps back up. “Kid... if you need help, I’m always here to listen.”

—

The train ride back seems noisier than usual. He might just be imagining things, but it feels like everyone is staring at him, pointing out his uniform and whispering behind his back. Hitoshi wishes he had Kakashi’s quirk so that he could genjutsu himself out of existence.

Kakashi...

Hitoshi pulls out his phone. He should probably call him. There’s no way he hasn’t heard about the incident by now, and it’s certain that he’ll be calling soon, demanding a full report like the overprotective brother he is. Hitoshi wonders what Kakashi would say about the situation and the choices he made. His grip tenses around the phone. Hitoshi can hear him already.

Take him out as quickly and efficiently as possible, his brother whispers. Minimize casualties—

But there’s another voice too. *As a hero, it is your duty to protect everyone*, All Might says, blue eyes boring into his skull. *Your methods were unbecoming of a future hero—*

Hitoshi had told Kakashi once that he’d be an amazing hero, the *best* hero, and his brother had failed to respond, simply smiling that strange smile of his. He’d slipped into crime and wasted away all his chances in order to give Hitoshi his dreams. But he’d still found a way regardless. Now Kakashi is moonlighting as a vigilante, a non-lethal defender of the people. Kakashi hasn’t told him, but it’s fairly obvious. His brother is good, his brother is a *hero*, right?

You have to do what is necessary, Kakashi insists, but then there’s Aizawa in his ear.

Taking a life? That’s not something you can ever take back.

Killing is wrong. Killing is necessary. There are a hundred voices

swirling in his head, and Hitoshi doesn't know what to think, whose advice to heed. He's always listened to Kakashi first and foremost. It's his *brother*. And his brother is never wrong. Kakashi may be a troll and a menace, but he's never *wrong*. He can't be wrong.

Can he?

Your brother was wrong, the police officer had said, so many years ago. There had been blood on his hands and stains on his shoes, and Kakashi had just murdered a man without blinking. He had smiled, and looked at Hitoshi, and told him that everything was just fine—

Your brother was wrong.

Hitoshi slides his phone back into his pocket.

Chapter End Notes

The drama begins.

Festival

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He locks the phone with a quiet click, and stares at the flat, black screen.

Ever since the villain attack, something has changed. Kakashi doesn't want to say that they've grown distant, no, that's not true at all. But there's something different about Hitoshi these days. A slight fraction of a change that's visible in the way he emotes and in the responses he gives.

It's probably due to what occurred at the end of the attack. Kakashi had listened to his brother's story very carefully, but he had also proceeded to sneak into the police station to get his hands directly on the actual reports. And from the way that they're written—

It's like they're condemning him. Hitoshi had acted confidently and quickly. He'd removed the threat and he'd saved his teacher and classmates. Kakashi is proud of him. He'd even told him so, but instead of blushing and trying to brush it off, his brother's gaze had shuttered and he'd quickly changed the subject.

What exactly had the heroes told him? Kakashi tries to keep a cool head, but his blood had simmered, imagining the callous words they would have thrown at him. It's downright stupid that they would place Hitoshi in the wrong. This peaceful world with all their stigma against any sort of violence or self-defence... It's ridiculous.

"You took out the enemy, and you protected your class," Kakashi had praised. "You did a good job. I wouldn't have acted any differently."

He had given Hitoshi an encouraging smile and offered to take him out for dinner, but Hitoshi had only asked him to drop it.

Kakashi remembers ice in his veins and scathing words on his tongue. He thinks of bitter anger at the pointlessness of arguing with people who will never understand. It's disappointing, that's true, but Hitoshi isn't alone. Kakashi will make sure of that. He'll always do the best he can to support his brother.

He sighs and tucks the phone back into his pocket, pulling out his

mask instead. It's time to patrol.

He patrols often these days. The sheer freedom of roof hopping from building to building and using his skills in the way they're meant to be used is exhilarating. This patrol is different though. He has a target this time.

Akaguro Chizome, aka Stendhal, aka Stain. A murderous vigilante who goes after heroes that don't abide by his unforgiving ideology. He's killed seventeen and crippled twenty-three, all promising and talented Pro-Heroes who somehow failed to make the grade. In short, he's a powerful extremist with a useful quirk and excellent fighting skills.

Kakashi might be worried about facing such a dangerous opponent blind, but he's done his homework. He's not Mustafu's prime information broker for nothing. Stain's speed, strength and weapons handling will make it a difficult task, but planning around his blood paralysis quirk will hopefully win him the fight. The key is to not be caught in an ambush. No, Kakashi plans on ambushing him instead.

With the mask affixed to his face, gloves on, and weapons strapped on, Kakashi's ready to go. He takes one last look at the time before starting his journey across the rooftops. The UA sports festival is today, but with any luck, he'll be able to subdue Stain and then pop back over to Mustafu to catch Hitoshi in the one on one battles.

He continues travelling over the buildings, paying careful attention to the darkened alleyways of Hosu City. Stain is best in close-quarters combat, with narrow spaces and not a lot of room to manoeuvre. That's where he'll be hiding.

To be honest, Kakashi hadn't originally planned on going directly after villains. His vigilante persona was more for the potential to help people and use his quirk, as well as stress relief. But with the criminal underworld getting restless and all these villains stirring... It's about time he did something. Especially considering it's his little brother who will be having to face them one day. The safest thing to do is to cut them off at the pass.

Kakashi is passing his eleventh alleyway when he hears the sound of knives on metal.

A kunai is already in his hand as he runs along the side towards the lip of the rooftop. Below, Stain and Ingenium face-off, caught in a deadly matchup of weapons versus speed. Kakashi purses his lips,

casting a critical eye over the hero. Ingenium's engines make him fast, capable of accelerating in seconds, but it's a disadvantage in the narrow setting. This is likely not a fight he can win.

Ingenium blows past Stain, leg raised for a brutal kick. Stain rolls, softening the blow, and manages to score heavy dents on the metallic armour in return. The hero is forced to stagger into a turn as he reaches the end of the alley. His airbags flare as he tries to pivot, preparing himself for another confrontation. His mouth is fixed in a straight, grim line.

It's when he turns that Kakashi finally manages to see it. The chink in his armour. The trickle of blood that drips down the shining metal.

Kakashi speeds up, catapulting himself over the final obstacle. Down below, a pink, mottled tongue flicks out, about to activate the paralysis, but Kakashi doesn't give him a chance, throwing six shuriken in quick succession. The first scores a shallow cut across Stain's cheek, but he dodges and parries the rest, using the bloodstained katana to knock them away.

"A surprise attack," Stain drawls. "From a fellow vigilante, even."

"Who are you?" Ingenium asks urgently. "Never mind, get out of here! This is Stain, the Hero Killer!"

Kakashi doesn't reply to either of them, just keeps his eyes fixed on his opponent.

"And why are you here, vigilante?" Stain asks, eyes glowing wildly. "Do you come as a purveyor of justice, saving even the undeserving?"

Kakashi nearly snorts. *Him*, a purveyor of justice? It's a good thing the mask conceals the quirk of his lips.

"Stand down, Stain." The vocal modifier flattens his voice to a low drone. He shifts his weight and carefully doesn't look at the still-dripping blood.

"I don't think I will. I have no quarrel with you. If you stand aside and let me purge this weak sham of a hero, then we have no reason to fight."

"Tempting," Kakashi says dryly, "but I'll have to pass." He pauses. "Why are you after Ingenium? He's hardly corrupt."

Stain barks out a laugh. “He works to uphold his family legacy and rise in the ranks. Those are not the actions of a hero truly pure of heart!”

“It’s true that I’m a legacy,” Ingenium says carefully, “and that my family has influenced my career choices. There’s no denying that. But I became a hero to help people who are in need, and I think I can say that I do my best to achieve this every day.”

“A true hero requires conviction. Conviction, and power. Those that are too weak to stand on their own will be weeded out.” Stain bares his teeth. “Feel my conviction!”

He steps forward, sword raised high, as killing intent suddenly flares. The world presses down on them, thick and furious, as a malevolent aura promises them nothing but death. At the end of the alleyway, Ingenium freezes, engines stuttering in terror. It’s pure bloodlust and thirst for the kill that stops the hero in his tracks.

Kakashi smiles and hops forward, bouncing off the ledge. He revels in the brief look of shock that flickers across Stain’s face.

“Don’t worry, Ingenium,” he calls out to the hero. “I promise you, you won’t die here.”

Ingenium nods shakily, piecing together his previous composure. “I’ll take him down.”

He revs up his engines and swings back, bounding off the walls to power down from above. Kakashi does the same, dropping a series of blows that send the katana flying. He tries to work with Ingenium, supporting him with kunai and wire, but it’s difficult to time correctly. He’s forced to back off, just as Stain vaults over Ingenium’s shoulders, pulling out a long knife.

No! Kakashi intercepts just in time. Genjutsu is delicate and precise, something he wasn’t always great at, but he’s had a lot of practice since his last life. Targeting Stain with a vestibular genjutsu, he messes with his balance and sends him stumbling.

Ingenium gasps as he finishes yet another tight spin.

Stain... skids towards his rusty katana.

Kakashi tries to intercept yet again, but he’s too late this time. From his sprawl on the ground, the Hero Killer’s tongue darts out and laps

up the scattered crimson droplets. With a quiet hissed breath, Ingenium's limbs lock up. He drops to the ground like a puppet with its strings cut.

"One down," Stain growls. "Last chance to walk away."

Unfortunate, but it's not over yet. Kakashi looks into Akaguro Chizome's manic eyes and recenters his weight. Breathes in. Breathes out.

"My turn."

Kakashi *knows* killers. He's been one. He's met hundreds. And that's how he knows that the most fearsome killers aren't those that emit uncontrolled bloodlust and fury, but those that are cold. Cool-blooded. The ones that would think nothing of killing you simply because you were in their way.

Kakashi's not quite like *that*, but he does have his own special brand of killing intent.

His is full of protectiveness and rage. It's white hot-lightning, crackling and pure, intent on its target. It's the air giving way and the promise of loyalty until death. It's ozone, and terror, and fulfilling his duty no matter how many bodies he has to go through.

Stain stumbles, limbs shaking. "You—" he gasps.

"*You are no hero.*"

—

Kakashi is finishing up the last knot when Ingenium finally regains freedom of movement.

"Good," he says, cinching the wires tightly. He pulls at the bonds, satisfied. "You can take care of the rest?"

The hero climbs to his feet. "Yes, of course. But you should stay and see it through. This was your capture, after all."

"Stay and follow Stain into a jail cell?" Kakashi laughs. "I think I'll let you handle it."

"We wouldn't imprison you," Ingenium protests.

"You wouldn't?" Kakashi asks, intrigued. In all other situations,

everyone was always horrified at the idea of an individual operating without a Pro-Hero license and freely using their quirk. “I *am* a vigilante.”

“You saved my life,” Ingenium says earnestly. “Yes, there will be questions, but stay and let me thank you.”

“Ah, I appreciate the offer, but I think I’ll let you handle it.”

Ingenium pauses, muscles tensing.

“Sorry, I’m running late! Ja ne!” Kakashi dashes away, risking a glance back at Ingenium. The hero’s on the balls of his toes, deciding if he should follow, before ultimately deciding to stay put and watch over Stain.

“I’ll find you!” He yells across the alley. “And when I do, I’ll thank you properly!”

Kakashi shakes his head and continues sprinting. He has a train to catch.

—

The festival is already in full gear by the time Kakashi makes his way to the stands. Down below, two figures face off in the middle of the stadium. Kakashi glances down as a boy and a shadowy construct swoop forward to attack their opponent. The green haired girl leaps away to safety. The fight concludes as the girl’s impossibly lengthy tongue is pulled, and the shadowy bird flares and knocks her out of the ring.

The noise rises in a loud cheer. Confectionary stands, 1v1 matchups, over important idiots, crowds baying for blood... Ah, this really brings back the good old days. It’s strange to say that he misses the chunin exams considering the last one he actively attended ended in an out of control jinchuuriki and a full-on invasion, but there’s still something nostalgic about it all.

The two competitors exit the stadium fairly peacefully, exchanging words as they leave.

No last minute attacks? No swearing a lifetime of vengeance? Maybe this sports festival thing is pretty different after all.

Kakashi carries on in his quest to find a seat, eventually settling down

in a corner at the edge of the stairs. The next two contestants enter the ring, this time a tall boy with engines coming out of his calves, and a blond with a long fleshy tail.

Ojiro Mashirao and Iida Tenya. Huh. Kakashi leans forward and examines Iida's exhaust pipes more carefully. Yep. Definitely the same style as Ingenium's. He casts his mind around for the hero's name. Iida *Tensei*. So they were probably brothers, then.

Small world.

He watches idly as the two face off. The blond clearly has some skill in martial arts, a form of karate maybe. He's alright, but he's clearly only used it in spars, with minimal practice in live combat. In the end, Iida's superior speed wins out. Kakashi claps politely with the rest of the audience as the match is called.

"And in our next matchup, we have a member of the hero course, the girl who can make anything! That's right, she's a recommended student too, give it up for Class 1-A's *Yaoyorozu Momo*! Versus... our mysterious hero course student, he can stop you in your tracks! Also from Class 1-A... *Shinsou Hitoshi*!"

Kakashi snorts at the introductions. They were extravagant and over the top, but at least they didn't give too much away. *Mysterious*, though. Kakashi wonders if Hitoshi had attempted to hide his quirk from his classmates or not.

Down below, his brother stands at the edge of the ring with his hands at ready and his determined face on. It's adorable. Kakashi would give an extra loud cheer to embarrass him properly, but it's probably best that he not attract too much attention to himself. He'll have to settle for the gift he plans on leaving later.

"Eighth match..." the announcer cries. "Start!"

The girl's opening move is to pull a long baton out from her body. Hitoshi circles warily, judging the distance with his eyes and carefully examining his opponent. Yaoyorozu doesn't immediately move to attack, and they circle for a second more, before Hitoshi seems to come to a decision. He abruptly closes the distance with a fast rush and sweep.

The girl counters fluidly with her pole. She's good and she's trained, that's true, but she clearly wasn't personally taught by a former ANBU captain. Besides, she's nervous. It's putting her off balance, and

Hitoshi is doing his best to take advantage of that, pressing her with quick jabs and not giving her room to breathe.

Kakashi vaguely wonders if Hitoshi will draw his kunai. He knows he supplied his brother with plenty. Probably not though, if this is only a friendly match. It's a shame this world doesn't teach proper knife handling skills.

The match is over when Hitoshi ducks around another thrust and uses the pole as leverage to throw her out of bounds. The girl looks teary eyed but accepting, taking Hitoshi's hand when he offers it to her. They proceed out of the stadium together, back to their special class box in the stands.

All in all, that match was a fairly good showing of their abilities. Kakashi's impressed with how far his brother has come, and the Yaoyorozu definitely had her strengths as well. And now that the first round is over, it's high time he left his brother a little present.

Kakashi stretches as he stands, before ambling off towards the closed off section of the auditorium. A large sign over the door reads *Private Area: Staff and Students Only*, but since when has Kakashi ever let something like that stop him?

He slips inside, letting the door shut quietly behind him. Once he's in the hallway, he puts a genjutsu up and keeps to the shadows. Wouldn't do to get caught here, after all. Class 1-A's dressing room is pretty easy to find. He pokes his head into the room and sees a toothy redhead, and... is that *explosions boy*?

Hitoshi has had a lot to say about one Bakugou Katsuki, and relatively little of it good. He's tempted to mess with the boy, but that's not why he's here, so with a sorrowful heart, he holds himself back. Instead, he layers the genjutsu a bit more strongly, before striding past the two students to reach what he's determined to be Hitoshi's locker.

The lock is ridiculously easy to pick. He listens idly to the conversation between the two students – a one sided conversation interrupted by the occasional growl – and yanks the door open. There's a change of clothes and a water bottle, but lots of room for other things. Things like the stuffed cat Kakashi bought his brother, which he plops on top of the folded clothing, and the small pot of nasturtium flowers. They're a little rumpled, but Kakashi takes the time to straighten out the flower heads and position them a bit better so they aren't drooping over the edge of the pot. He scribbles a note

too, placing it on top.

Good luck! He writes. *Don't mess up!*

He considers, then adds a miniature henohenomoji as the finishing touch.

And with that, his job is done. Kakashi slides the locker closed, then changes the combo on the lock before clicking it shut. He smiles gleefully at the thanks Hitoshi will surely give him for the extra practice. Then he heads out the way he came, leaving the two hero students to their pre-battle preparations.

It's as he's sliding out the door and dropping the genjutsu, just on his way back to retake his place in the stands, that he nearly bumps into someone. He does a quick sidestep, easily catching himself and pivoting on his feet. Kakashi's a fairly observant person and he normally doesn't almost run into people. But he thinks he can be excused just this once, as the individual in question has got to be under three feet tall.

"I'm afraid I didn't see you there," the principal of UA says lightly.

Kakashi relaxes his body, sinking into a lazy, close-eyed slouch. "Not a problem, Principal-san. Excuse me."

"Off in such a rush? You're not trying to catch a glimpse of the promising new heroes?" He inclines his head towards the clearly marked door sign.

"Not at all. I'm afraid I just got a bit turned around."

"This section of the stadium is a bit confusing." Nezu allows, eyes gleaming. "It's fairly far from the main seating, and we wouldn't want you getting lost again, so allow me to escort you back."

"There's no need," Kakashi demures.

"Please."

Kakashi finally concedes, so they end up walking back down the corridor together. He could simply genjutsu the principal and run, but that's a bit of an extreme action to take when hardly anything has even happened yet. Besides, he's rumoured to be one of the smartest people in the country. Such an action could end up being a grave mistake.

Instead, they end up making polite small talk. Or what seems like small talk, but is really just a cover for light interrogation.

“How are you enjoying the Sports Festival?”

“It’s entertaining.” Kakashi does his best to sound slightly more invested.

“Surely it must have made more of an impression than *that*. Are you a hero fan?”

Kakashi very carefully does not express the precise nature of his thoughts on the hero industry. “Something like that.”

“And you’ve never considered applying for UA?” Nezu looks him up and down. “I haven’t come across your profile. What was your name?”

He narrows his eyes. “Kakashi,” he says simply. It should be fine to tell him that much. It isn’t the name on his birth certificate, after all.

“Just Kakashi? Hm. Have you ever wanted to be a hero?”

He gives a closed mouth smile through the mask. “Ah, the hero life isn’t really for me.”

Nezu hums. “Really. Whyever not?”

“It’s very violent,” Kakashi says. He considers adding a bit of a shake to his voice, but it comes out rather bland. “The heroic life seems quite dangerous.”

“Your reflexes earlier were incredibly good, as well as your positioning,” Nezu observes. “I’d be shocked if you told me you’d never done any sort of training.” His expression reads as if he’s daring Kakashi to say otherwise.

Kakashi slouches even further downwards. “Maa, I garden, you know. I train to fend off the squirrels.”

“I’m sure UA could help train you to keep them away entirely.”

“But the constraints of hero costume fashion is suffocating,” Kakashi says instead. “I would never join an industry that didn’t allow me to express my unique sense of style.”

Nezu looks over Kakashi’s pastel yellow dog hoodie. “I’m sure the costuming department could work around that.”

Their walk is leisurely and slow, and the first match of the second round starts before Kakashi reaches his seat. They can see Bakugou and the red head facing off from the television screens lining the walkway. It's not a particularly elegant fight. There's a lot of battering blows and brute force tanking, but the crowd eats it up. An explosive quirk like that really is an all-round crowd pleaser.

"And what do you think of this match?" Nezu prods. "That's Bakugou Katsuki, our student representative."

Kakashi hums. "They're both very talented."

They're all talented and impressive, yes, but they're still civilians. Kakashi's genin would have eaten them up for breakfast. Or befriended them and raised them into a fanatical army of terrors. Yes, that sounded more like the Naruto thing to do.

Nezu peers at him inquisitively. "Not everyone can get a ticket to the UA Sports Festival. For having spent the time and money to get in, you don't appear to be very excited."

"What can I say? I'm interested in the talents of the next generation." He pauses. "A lot of people are."

Is that a weird thing for a fellow fifteen year old to say? Oh well.

But the fact of the matter is this. These children are not shinobi. They aren't prepared for enemies coming after them with the intent to kill. But that's what has happened, and that's what will continue happening, so they have to be prepared. Broadcasting all their skills onto a screen for millions to watch and dissect, whether hero or villain, is not being prepared.

And yes, the chunin exams were much of the same, but it was mainly for intimidation, and they at least *tried* to prevent information leakage.

"I see." Nezu finally says. He's still friendly, but something in his voice has cooled.

They've reached the edge of the stands now, and Kakashi's keen to get away. "Thank you for the escort, Principal-san."

The principal's smile returns, white and toothy. "Not at all. It was a pleasure talking with you. I must say, I'd be very interested in seeing how you do in my hero course."

“Ah, well it’s a shame I’m not interested.”

“A shame.” Nezu regards him for a second longer. “A shame indeed.”

Kakashi narrows his eyes but gives a little salute as he makes his way into the cover of the crowd. That was certainly an odd encounter, but with any luck, nothing will come of it. He finds another empty seat and settles back in to watch the next few matches.

They progress with moderate excitement. The shadow bird boy swoops a pink girl out of the ring. There’s a prolonged shouting match between someone with a very interesting ice quirk, and a green-haired boy who breaks his bones at him to attack. And then there’s his brother on the field once more, up against engine leg boy.

Kakashi leans forward in anticipation, and watches Hitoshi catch mini-Ingenium in his quirk right out of the gate. There’s a taunting expression on his face, and Kakashi wonders exactly what he said to provoke the boy into responding. It’s a good choice even though it’s only the quarter-finals. That boy was *fast*.

The whispers of the crowd grate on Kakashi’s nerves. He hopes Hitoshi doesn’t hear it, but from the put-upon look on his face, he most likely does. He still goes over to talk to Iida, and the boy says something back that has Hitoshi smirking.

There’s another break, and then they’re back. Todoroki versus Tokoyami, this time. Kakashi watches Todoroki take out the bird-headed construct, and summarily defeat his opponent. In Hitoshi’s next match, he watches as his brother tries to mouth off to the blond, but is furiously ignored. Hitoshi gives it a good attempt, and uses quite a few very impressive moves, but in the end, explosions win out and he is sent sprawling.

A shame, but still a very good job done by his brother. Kakashi stands up to leave, making a mental note to buy more explosives. Maybe if he spends more time chasing Hitoshi around with a stick of dynamite, it will help him improve his skills. His lips tighten. He needs to be more prepared, after all, considering the danger coming his way.

—

Kakashi is an experienced shinobi, meaning he always has a trick up his sleeve. He encourages Hitoshi to do the same, and would ordinarily prevent him from revealing his cards too early, however this time it doesn’t really make a difference whether he shows his

quirk in the festival or not.

The leader of the League of Villains already knows exactly what he can do.

As an information broker, keeping an ear to the ground is a necessity. That's why he quickly becomes aware of the League's activities and recruitment drives. It also means that he is very aware of the League's targets and current grudges; namely, All Might and his fifteen year old little brother.

For now, they're just a nuisance and hardly worth going after. He'll keep listening to the news, and he'll be able to act if they're gearing up to anything big, but Kakashi's just a vigilante for practice. He doesn't do *real* missions, and he's probably not capable of shutting down the whole League, at least not yet. Besides, Hitoshi is not in immediate danger, so he shouldn't do anything drastic. There's no need to go on any shinobi-style elimination missions just yet.

The mindset still somehow manages to creep into his patrols. *Do they really deserve to live?* He'll ask himself, after capturing a particularly disgusting target. *It would be safer if I stopped them entirely*, he reasons, before reluctantly switching the sharp blade of the knife for a pommel to the temple.

The League continues growing. It gets more members, *powerful* members, with a rumoured unstoppable shadow leader hiding somewhere in its depths.

Kakashi continues to stress. He's more violent now, and he wants Hitoshi to stay safe. He needs to do something but he's not sure what.

Inconvenience the League, he decides. He won't go after them directly, but he *will* go after their partners, who are just as bad. The Shie Hassaikai branch of the Yakuza is rumoured to have dealings with the League, and there are reports of human experimentation and child trafficking, two things Kakashi will absolutely not put up with. That's certainly worth targeting.

But he can't go after the entire Yakuza without casualties. He's good, but that would be ridiculously difficult. There's just no way. And Yakuza members often have connections within the law enforcement, so there would be no use in simply leaving their cases to the authorities...

Kakashi buys a new mask. It's bone white this time, and it gazes

silently back at him from its place on the floor mat next to his carefully sharpened katana.

He places it over his face, and it feels like saying goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

...Did someone guess ANBU arc?

Intern

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He'd initially been frustrated by the low number of offers, but the name located about halfway down the page has him struggling to breathe.

Eraserhead. *Eraserhead*. Mentoring *him*? His gaze shoots up to meet Aizawa's, but his teacher just stares lazily back at him with half-lidded eyes.

He doesn't even have to think. Of course he'd love to mentor under Eraserhead. There's a warm glow of pleasure in his belly at the thought of his teacher personally taking the time to teach him. A glow that is quickly extinguished when Midnight tells them what they will all be doing next.

"So?" Jirou asks, from across the aisle. "What are you gonna pick for your hero name?"

Hitoshi groans. "I have absolutely no idea. I always planned for my career path, but I never thought of hero names. Do you have something in mind?"

Jirou taps her whiteboard thoughtfully. "The easiest thing to do would be to just name myself after my quirk. What do you think of Earphone Jack as a hero name?"

Kaminari leans into the aisle from the next seat over. "Whaaat? You're not going to think of something unique?"

"It says what I need it to say," Jirou sniffs.

"It's practical," Hitoshi says. "But you're not going to try and disguise your quirk a little?"

She tugs on the long jacks descending from her ears. "It's kinda hard to hide."

That's true, and it doesn't give that much away so it's probably fine. Hitoshi turns away from the conversation in favour of going back to staring blankly at his own whiteboard.

He can't exactly copy Jirou and name himself after his own quirk. What would he be? The Villainous Hero: Brainwash? Yeah, right.

But what else can he name himself after? He could make up something else to do with his quirk. Mindjack? Mindwarp? Puppet Master? Brain Control? Something involving brains, or controlling people, or- or-

He has absolutely no idea.

"I intend to pick a name that will uphold the Iida hero legacy!" Iida announces loudly from the back of the class. He scribbles furiously, pen squeaking, before lifting his whiteboard up proudly. "I will be Veneno, the Engine Hero! Inspired by my brother, Ingenium!"

Hitoshi frowns. He's not exactly going for the family legacy route. What would he even do? Pick a name to match off of Kakashi's *Hound*, a secret his brother hasn't deigned to share with him yet? Hitoshi isn't even sure why his brother picked that name in the first place.

He looks around for more inspiration. Kirishima is equally loud, and Hitoshi can hear him from halfway across the class. "I'm gonna pick Red Riot as my hero name," he says proudly. "'Cause it's like Crimson Riot, get it?"

"Crimson Riot?" Sero asks curiously.

Kirishima puffs out his chest. "Only the manliest hero! He taught me to be fearless and live life without regret. That's why I'm naming myself after him!"

Naming himself after someone else. He could do that. Hitoshi casts his mind out for people who have inspired him. People he wants to be like, or model himself after.

There's only one Pro-Hero who he's been truly inspired by, and that's Eraserhead. But the idea of going to his internship with a horrible name like Controlhead or Erase Your Mind or something similarly atrocious makes him truly want to die.

But as for the only other person who he's ever been inspired by?

It's Kakashi. It's always been Kakashi.

Admittedly, Hitoshi has been harbouring some doubts about his brother these days. His viewpoints on certain laws can be a bit...

warped. But Kakashi is still the same brother who sneaks in and leaves him cat stuffed animals to make him smile. He's still the same person who taught him, and believed in him, and has always protected him. He's still good. He's still a hero. He needs to be.

Because ever since the very start, Kakashi's values have shaped who Hitoshi is today.

At the beginning, these values had been imprinted on Hitoshi through stories. Words swirl through his head, hazy memories of stories told under blanket forts, a world brought to life by Kakashi's longing voice. Hitoshi hasn't thought about his brother's Konoha tales in a while, but now they're all suddenly coming back to him. Stories about loyalty and deceit, ninjas and samurai, terrible enemies and unbreakable bonds.

Some of the characters had stood out more than most. The student, overcoming a lonely childhood, with the belief of never giving up and a world at peace. The teammate, silly and foolish, but with a golden heart that would never abandon a friend. And the father. Kind, gentle, but fierce. Protective. The man who had broken a rule and started a war in order to protect the people he cared about.

There were a lot of truly amazing characters in Kakashi's stories, but whenever the man named Sakumo was mentioned, Kakashi's face always twisted strangely. Hitoshi would ask what was wrong. Something about this character seemed intimately personal.

"There's nothing wrong," Kakashi would say. "He was a good man. He made mistakes and he... there's a lot he could have done differently. But he promised and he did his best. He was a true hero."

A true hero. That's exactly what Hitoshi wants to be.

When Kayama-sensei calls him to the front of the class, he turns his whiteboard around with two words clearly printed.

He'll protect his friends and he'll protect his loved ones. He swears it.

"My hero name will be White Fang."

—

"I don't see why you're so concerned," Hitoshi argues for the eleventh time. "He's a Pro-Hero. He's not just going to throw me into patrols and let me run off and die. He'll watch out for me. It's supposed to be

a learning experience.”

His brother doesn't look convinced. “Being a school teacher or a hero doesn't translate to having the capability of looking after someone in the field.”

“I can look after myself too, you know. Besides, you've probably already stalked and profiled him and everything. So you should know he can take care of me just fine.”

Kakashi's thoughtful frown transforms into a bright grin. “Ah, you know me too well! Fine, I *suppose* I can trust this Aizawa Shouta with my precious little brother's well-being. But remember that if anything comes up, you should call me right away, okay?”

“I know, I know.” Hitoshi rolls his eyes. “Look, it's just an internship. It'll be combat and quirk practice, and maybe some patrolling. That's it, nothing crazy.”

“Anything can happen.” His brother is looking at him seriously once more. “You should remember that, Hitoshi. You've already been attacked once, after all.”

Hitoshi is well aware of that. He remembers blood streaking down Aizawa's arm and a command on his lips. He knows that there's always a risk.

But still. It's an internship. It's not like he can pass this up.

“I'll be careful,” he promises.

It's kind of hypocritical that his brother is stressing about his safety so heavily when he's running around fighting off villains and getting into fights every other day. Hitoshi keeps an eye on the news. He's well aware that Kakashi has graduated from muggers and drug dealers to big time threats. Stain, the Hero Killer, anyone?

He narrows his eyes at his brother. “And you'll be careful too, right?”

Kakashi's eyes curve upwards. “Ah, don't you worry. I'm always careful. Besides, who would want to hurt an innocent florist like me?”

“Right.” Hitoshi mutters.

So. Still not telling him. Okay. Hitoshi tries not to let it bother him. It's fair that his brother has secrets, after all, he's already given up so

much to help Hitoshi, so the least he can do is give him this. Hitoshi doesn't want to pressure him, but at the same time, he can't help but be concerned. Kakashi's probably in danger a lot. He can handle it, certainly, but still.

Kakashi will tell him when he's ready. Hitoshi wills it to be true.

He tunes back into the conversation as Kakashi claps his hands. "So! It'll be your first time on the streets. I'm sure you'll soon be bringing in all the fans, ne?"

Hitoshi scoffs.

"How could you not! My adorable little brother just looks so cute in his hero costume. What name will they all be chanting then, hm?"

Sometimes he loves his brother, and other times Kakashi is especially insufferable.

Hitoshi mumbles his chosen name under his breath, praying that Kakashi won't make him repeat himself. Unfortunately, his prayers go unanswered.

"Sorry, what was that? I didn't hear you!"

"I said, White Fang." His face flushes. "Look, it's just that I couldn't think of anything, and then one of my classmates was naming himself after this hero he liked. And I was trying to think of things I admired, stuff I wanted to be like, and then I remembered some of the stories you used to tell, and I thought—"

He trails off.

Spread across his brother's face is that same expression. The one he would always make whenever Hatake Sakumo was brought up, the man he would *insist* was a hero. Why would a *hero* make him act like that? Back rigidly straight, lips pinched, but eyes still soft.

"...You don't like it." Hitoshi says tentatively.

"Ah, it's not that. Hitoshi—"

They're interrupted as Hitoshi's phone rings. He checks the caller ID. It's Aizawa, meaning it's probably concerning additional details regarding his internship starting tomorrow.

"Sorry, I should – take this." He pushes back his chair and stands up.

“Right, go on.” Kakashi waves a hand lightly.

They never finish the conversation.

—

Training with Aizawa is strange. He’s a good teacher, Hitoshi can’t deny that. But it’s absolutely nothing like being taught by Kakashi.

For one, there’s no absurd scenario of the day to deal with. Kakashi would often gleefully throw him into some ridiculous situation that he would attempt to pass off as training. It generally worked– Hitoshi will *never* forget the proper steps for fileting a salmon after the camping trip from hell. But Aizawa is patient, methodical and exacting. He sets out tasks for Hitoshi to complete and guides him through each step. While there’s the occasional logical ruse, it’s far less of looking underneath the underneath that Kakashi loves to employ.

Another difference is the amount of quirk usage. Even though his teacher had prefaced the internship by stating they would be focusing on physical ways to work around his non-physical quirk, they actually do far more quirk training than he’d ever done with Kakashi. It’s not that Kakashi didn’t want him to experiment and test his limits. But they’d never had a great deal of volunteers available, and Kakashi didn’t always react well to the floaty loss of control that his quirk imposed.

Aizawa actually works with him, encouraging him to expand his range and boost the number of people he can control at a time. He also tries to get Hitoshi to practice generalizing his trigger from questions to all sorts of statements. Hitoshi doesn’t have the heart to tell him that he’s always been able to do that, so he guiltily pretends it’s a new discovery.

It’s not all physical and quirk training though. Aizawa is a teacher, and he certainly doesn’t neglect the mental aspect.

“If you want to be an underground hero,” he lectures, “analysis is extremely important. Unlike spotlight heroes, we often don’t have the luxury of dealing with obvious opponents. The underground deals in secrets. Information like identity, quirk, organization... It’s very hard to come by. That’s why we often have to put things together going on very little data.”

Aizawa dumps a stack of papers onto Hitoshi’s desk. “Here are some of

the profiles we've written up on some of the active quirk users around my patrol area."

Hitoshi starts to flip through the stack and promptly ends up choking on his own saliva. About three pages in lies a blown up photo of the vigilante Hound.

"Is something wrong?" His teacher frowns.

"No, nothing," Hitoshi says hastily. "It's just- he really took down Stain? That's a big accomplishment."

"Mm, yes." Aizawa sips his coffee. "I'm actually taking a look at that one personally. When he took down Stain, he rescued a friend of mine. I'm very interested in talking to him."

"...Just talking?" Hitoshi asks suspiciously.

"No, I expect I'll try to have a chat, and he'll escape, and we'll do the whole charade again. He's very good at escaping."

Aizawa is *personally* after Kakashi? Hitoshi shakes his head. Nevermind that now. "He probably wouldn't want to stay and talk if you're trying to catch him."

"Vigilantism is illegal, you know," Aizawa says dryly. "But I'm not trying to put him in jail. So far, he's acted only to preserve the safety of others. If that changes, I'll reconsider, but even though what he's doing is reckless and illegal, from his height and build, he's likely not out of highschool quite yet. I would recommend that he go to a rehabilitation program."

Hitoshi nearly laughs. He imagines Kakashi lounging in a hard uncomfortable chair in a group circle talk. *My name is Shinsou Kakashi, and I'm here to change my illegal vigilante ways.*

It's illegal. It's illegal, but it's *Kakashi*. Hitoshi doesn't want to think about why in his mind, even the law seems to warp around Kakashi. And yes, Kakashi's said some things that Hitoshi has maybe questioned a bit ever since the whole USJ incident, but it's still Kakashi. His brother, who is good. Who is a *hero*.

"I hope you catch him," Hitoshi says, not meaning it in the slightest.

Hitoshi arrives home to a wrapped box sitting on his table.

He brushes his fingers over the crinkling wrapping paper, and carefully unwraps it. Inside is a dark lacquered box. It's glossy and smooth, and the lid easily slides off. And inside that...

"The White Fang needs his tanto," Kakashi says softly, appearing from behind the door.

Hitoshi jumps. "Don't break into my apartment!" He says it reflexively, but at this point it's a pretty useless demand. Kakashi has certainly never listened to it in the past. He goes back to examining the sword. It's short and straight, with a small circular handguard. The blade is a bright, shiny metal that glows in the afternoon light.

He picks it up, hand curving perfectly to fit around the smooth hilt. The sword is light, and when he sweeps it through the air, it feels sharp and sure.

"It's a beautiful sword," he says.

Kakashi leans against the wall. "Maa, it's no great chakra sabre, but I commissioned it specially. It's well-made, and I hope it serves you well." He deposits a sheathe onto the table beside the box.

"You didn't have to get me this," Hitoshi starts, running his fingers over the blade. "But. It's great, I love it. Thank you."

"We couldn't have the White Fang without his tanto," he repeats. He's smiling a little bitterly this time, and Hitoshi picks up on it.

"I chose the name because you always said the White Fang was a hero. Because he seemed like he was— you know. Brave. A good person. But I don't *have* to pick that name."

Kakashi's body uncoils, barely hidden tension seeping out of his frame. "No," he says softly. "Keep it. He was all that and more."

"Was?"

It's strange, the way he's phrasing it. Hatake Sakumo is nothing but a character from Kakashi's stories. The world of Konoha and the Elemental Nations is simply the product of his brother's astoundingly imaginative mind. But sometimes, those stories seem so personal to him, and now Hitoshi can't help but wonder...

“Ah, ignore that.” His brother dips his head, and then looks back, eyes locking on Hitoshi’s. “Hatake Sakumo is a hero, and I believe that if he were... in this world with us, he would be proud to see you carry on his legacy.”

The phrasing is strange, but the warm glow radiating out of his sternum allows him to ignore all that. Hitoshi grips the sword tightly and watches the blade glint in the light.

“Thank you,” he says again. “I’ll make you proud. I’ll do him justice.”

—

The tanto really is a beautiful piece of metalwork, but unfortunately Aizawa doesn’t seem to think the same. His voice is quietly disapproving as he inquires about Hitoshi’s new sword.

“You’re planning on making it your signature weapon?”

Hitoshi nods.

“I assume you’re experienced in handling a sword.”

“I’ve trained with a tanto for over five years,” Hitoshi argues. He can’t help but bristle. Of course he knows his way around a sword. “It’s a good weapon, and I know how to use it.”

Aizawa crosses his arms. “What about other options?”

“I have other weapons,” Hitoshi says, displaying two of the many kunai tucked into his hero costume. “I’ll still have more than just the tanto on me, so what’s the problem?”

“It’s not a bad thing to be proficient in bladed weapons,” Aizawa says mildly, “but it’s strange for someone your age. Putting that aside, you’ll likely need a better weapon as an acting Pro-Hero. Bladed weapons are deadly and difficult for making captures, and also not recommended for publicity reasons.”

“They’re deadly, but they’re practical,” Hitoshi protests. “It’s not like I’m going to go around stabbing everyone I meet.”

Aizawa looks at him critically. “In what situations would you use them?”

“In combat situations,” Hitoshi snaps. “And I’m not just going to jump straight to outright murder. That’s what you’re so worried about, isn’t

it?”

His teacher sighs. “No, Hitoshi, I don’t believe you’ll snap and start murdering everyone you see. You’re not a villain, unlike what some people may have told you. You’re a hero in training. And you’re my student, meaning it’s my responsibility to educate you on proper weapon use. I don’t disagree that knives or even swords can be useful, but take it from me, it’s far easier to cause harm that could have been avoided with a more suitable weapon. That’s what I’m trying to teach you.”

Hitoshi deflates. “Uh, right. Sorry. Is there a different weapon I could use, then?” He awkwardly slides the knives back into their sleeves. It’s probably a good thing he hasn’t pulled out his shuriken.

From around his neck comes the familiar tightly woven fabric of Aizawa’s capture scarf. He presents it to Hitoshi, hands outstretched. After a solid ten seconds go by without Hitoshi making any move to take it, Aizawa raises an eyebrow and dumps it in his arms.

“You’re giving me your capture weapon?” Hitoshi blurts.

“It’s only logical.” His teacher moves to readjust the collar of his jumpsuit. “We both work under very similar restrictions, and my capture weapon allows me to keep up physically with roof jumping and climbing, along with giving me more reach for nonlethal takedowns. It’s an excellent tool, and one that I think will suit you very well. If you agree, we can start training you with it now.”

“You think it will suit me,” he repeats.

“I do. It will certainly help you on your path to becoming a hero. Are you ready?”

It almost feels like a betrayal, taking the capture weapon when his tanto still sits on his back. But that’s ridiculous. He can have more than one weapon, it’s just called being prepared.

Hitoshi runs his fingers over the thick material, and looks back up at his teacher, who stares plainly back at him. Aizawa is training him in his personal fighting style. Aizawa gave him his own capture weapon. Aizawa believes he can be a hero.

He firms his grip around the scarf.

“I’m ready.”

Chapter End Notes

Nobody tell Hitoshi what happened to the original White Fang.

Yakuza

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He presses the tip of his katana tightly against the hollow of the shaking man's throat. His voice is carefully modulated as it rings into the empty air.

"Tell me about your leader."

"I can't!" The man sobs. "Please, he'll kill me!"

Kakashi's breathing doesn't change as he keeps the blade steady. "He's not here right now, I am. Tell me about him. What is his name?"

"I don't know— I don't know! I swear, please don't—"

Does he really not know? Kakashi considers it. This man is clearly on the low end of the Yakuza hierarchy, but surely he's heard of the leader, or at least some of his abilities. This is the third base he's hit in the past few weeks, and while he's been slowly gathering more and more data on their alliances and activities, he still knows next to nothing about the shadowy boss that seems to inspire terror in nearly every gang member.

"If you don't have any information for me, then this conversation is over," Kakashi warns, shifting his grip on the katana's hilt.

"I can't! If he finds out I spilled... He'll take me apart!"

Now *this* is potentially very interesting information.

"What do you mean by that?"

"He'll take me apart," the man sobs. "He'll leave me in pieces. It's his quirk, he's gonna fillet me—"

Kakashi hums, and rewards the man by pulling his sword back, leaving just enough space to allow him room to take heaving sappy breaths without cutting his throat open. Tears pool in his eyes, and perspiration beads on his skin.

"Do you have details on exactly how his quirk works?"

“I- I-”

They’re interrupted by the sound of distant footsteps. Someone is coming down the stairs. They haven’t seen the bloody trail that Kakashi has cut in order to force his way in just yet, but they will soon if he doesn’t act fast.

In front of him, the man’s pupils are dilated. From his place on the floor, his fists clench, and his muscles tense. Kakashi’s well adept in reading body language, and he knows for a fact that this man is about to do something very stupid. He leans forward as if to lunge, and his mouth opens wide–

Kakashi swipes the katana across his throat. Blood sprays out, crimson and furious, but Kakashi turns him just so, and by the end of it all, there’s not a single droplet on him. He holds the body as it collapses back, placing it on the floor, before standing up and walking to position himself behind the door. He holds himself still and silent.

“Yo, Hamazaki,” a hoarse voice calls out. They’re getting closer, wandering towards the door. “Do you have a light? I could really use a–”

There’s a woman caught in the entryway, eyes wide as she takes in the gory scene. Kakashi intends to take advantage of her shock with a quick takedown, but she manages to dodge away just as he surges forward. Good reflexes, but it’s a simple thing to catch up, kicking her out at the knees and sending her to the ground. He levels his katana to the base of her neck.

“Don’t move.”

“So you’re finally here,” she rasps. “*Katana.*”

“Is that what they’re calling me? Not a very exciting name.”

“Yeah, well. It fits you. You have a reputation, you know. Take no prisoners, leave no witnesses.”

“Clearly you’ve still heard of me.”

“You missed a camera.” She tries to look at him out of the corner of her eye, but he digs the sword in warningly. “The boss is *pissed.*”

“The boss?”

“Overhaul. That’s the name he goes by, anyway.”

Freely given information makes him slightly wary, so he tries to go over what he might have missed. “Why are you telling me this?”

“I fucking *hate* Overhaul. I still work for him, because you gotta do what you gotta do, but he’s an utter asshole. And he’s into child experimentation. I’m not a great person, but even I don’t touch stuff like that.”

“So you’re turning on him,” Kakashi states dubiously. “Just like that?”

“You have a sword at my neck, man. Of course I’m turning on him.”

Her voice is gritty and filled with tension, even as she tries to play at being relaxed. Kakashi considers her carefully.

“What do you plan on doing after this?”

“I can’t promise to turn things around forever,” she says, “but I’m not going back to the Shie Haissakai, that’s for sure.”

“Alright.”

He lowers his sword, and they make eye contact as she scrambles to her feet.

“Oh. *Oh*. You’re just– Okay.”

“I have some questions for you,” Kakashi says, “but they’ll have to wait. We shouldn’t stick around. Let’s go.”

He turns towards the door and starts descending the stairs, showing her his unprotected back. It’s regretful, but not entirely a surprise when three loud gunshots echo into the air. She watches his red soaked form fall limply down the stairs with a strangely furrowed brow. Her gun is still raised.

Kakashi shifts his head slightly, and her eyes snap to his. The barrel moves towards him, and he acts. Dismissing the genjutsu, as it clearly didn’t work, he dodges sideways, sending one knife into the meat of her hand to knock out the gun, and the other into her chest.

The gun fires into the floorboards as it falls, and the woman collapses in on herself, uninjured hand coming to her heart.

“You–” She chokes. Both her hands are stained with red.

“You didn’t fall for the genjutsu,” Kakashi notes.

“Motion sense,” she gasps. “It’s my quirk. I could tell when you were and weren’t moving. I–”

“I wouldn’t have killed you if you had turned. But I suppose the Yakuza served you just fine after all.”

“Overhaul’s an asshole. But he pays well. I don’t have– any other options. Need the money.”

“I see.” He looks her over. Her breaths come out sharp and panting, and her face is white. Her lips quirk the tiniest bit as she stares into his blank, white mask.

“Make it quick?”

“I will,” he promises.

Blood splatters, and then it’s silent once more.

–

He checks his email once he gets back to the shop, and is displeased to open his inbox to *yet another* email from the UA principal.

Concerning Your Future Enrollment, the subject line reads.

As much as he wants to, he can’t simply delete it. With nine emails in the past few months, he can tell Nezu is getting desperate. He’s not sure exactly what he did to arouse such suspicion, but he knows he can’t keep avoiding him. If he continues his trend of misleading responses and evasive statements, Nezu is sure to escalate.

Kakashi eyes the email again and sighs. He doesn’t even have to open it to know what it’s going to say.

The first email the principal had sent him had been concerning his potential application to UA highschool. According to the email, their brief meeting had somehow convinced Nezu that Kakashi would be a prime applicant, and he was welcome to meet for a conversation regarding his heroic future. Kakashi had politely replied that he was not interested, and was also slightly concerned that Nezu had somehow gotten his email address.

In truth, Kakashi isn’t that concerned about the whole email thing. He had put the name Kakashi on his new documents for the flower shop,

after all. But the whole meeting up thing? That isn't going to happen. If Nezu has already had his suspicions raised from their one brief meeting at the Sports Festival, it seems like a particularly bad idea to give him another chance to analyze Kakashi's motives.

The first email had been perfectly polite, but the next few became more and more forceful. He seemed to really be pushing for a face to face meeting, and gave out many convincing arguments on why Kakashi should be interested in attending hero school. He had even offered a sponsorship and recommendation letter. If Kakashi had been any other gullible young student with big hopes and dreams, he would have taken it in an instant. It looked great on paper. But fortunately, Kakashi knows better. The whole affair stinks of heavy handed information gathering.

Looking back, it's possible Nezu thinks Kakashi is some sort of villain informant. The informant part is true, but he stays far away from any villainous buyers. It could have been that discrete warning he'd snuck in at the end of their conversation, the implication he'd dropped that people other than heroes would be interested in the talents of the current class of students. Still. He'd hardly been threatening. There was certainly no need for the deluge of bothersome mail.

And now that he keeps refusing to meet, he's looking more and more suspicious. It's inconvenient, but there's nothing that he can do about it now. He'll just have to work around it, just like all the other problems he's been dealing with these days.

He's so busy. He doesn't have time for this.

Kakashi runs a heavy hand through his hair and shuts down the computer.

—

As busy as he is with Katana, Kakashi isn't ready to give up his Hound persona just yet. This means he needs to ensure that there is absolutely no connection between vigilantes. Reduced patrol and sightings would definitely be an indicator, so Kakashi makes up for it by doing double time and pulling extra shifts. This is difficult, as most of his income comes from odd jobs and info broking, so he can't exactly cut back on that. Besides, he still needs to keep up appearances in his shop, if he doesn't want to arouse too much suspicion.

The result of all this is that Kakashi gets very little sleep.

To make matters worse, there's the issue of Eraserhead. For some reason, Ingenium, who had previously informed him he was not trying to put Kakashi in jail, decided to task Eraserhead with his capture. Not all heroes are especially competent, but unfortunately, Eraserhead is one that Kakashi can reluctantly admire. He's no shinobi, but he's smart and quick, and ruthless when he needs to be.

Kakashi does his best to work around it. He doesn't want to fatally injure his brother's teacher and mentor, so he tries to avoid the common patrol routes and get out of sight when necessary. The problem is that they have very similar patrols, and there's no way Kakashi is going to let himself get kicked out of Mustafu entirely.

It's exceptionally late when he gets out the door with his regular red and white ANBU mask on. He takes a winding route along the water, staying in the dimly lit areas of the far harbour. There's not too much going on, just the occasional mugger and a possible smuggling case that he doesn't touch yet, just observes. The circuitous path takes him back to the more urban districts, with neon signs and high rises. That's where he has the misfortune to run into Eraserhead once again.

Kakashi immediately turns to evade, but Eraserhead puts his hands up. It's not exceptionally comforting, as that's the prime position to start making hand signs, or start up any sort of hand-directed attack. Still, he understands that from Eraserhead, it's a sign of nonaggression.

"You don't have to run," the man says. "I just want to talk."

Kakashi doesn't respond, but he does shift back warily. He already has his exit route calculated, a thin set of railings that can be easily scaled, dropping down to a tunnel below.

"There's a lot of reasons people go vigilante," he starts. "But that's not a good way to go. You want to do good, I can tell. You're focused and determined. But on your own? It's easy to slip and mess up, you could even get really hurt. I can help you. There's a program you could attend to help you do what you do, but legally."

The mask hides the bitter smile Kakashi sports. It's kind of the man to offer, but Kakashi knows what he is. He still has no desire to be a hero, no matter who's offering.

He shifts his weight again, and Eraserhead steps forward, voice pitching urgently. He can tell he's losing him.

"Don't do this, kid," he says. "I can give you a chance, a real chance.

You're trying to do the right thing, but vigilantism isn't the way to do it. If you want to be a hero—"

"I'm not a hero," Kakashi says.

It's time to go. He shifts back, foot planting off the edge of the roof.

"Wait—"

Kakashi drops down the silver bars into the inky darkness below. He pulls off a rather tricky maneuver, trading out exits once in the tunnel, but it looks like he didn't need to go through all the trouble. Eraserhead pursues, but quickly drops off. Maybe he really did just want to help.

For the briefest of seconds, Kakashi imagines it. Going to a program. Accepting the recommendation. He could do it. Hitoshi's right in that Kakashi has all the skills, has all the experience. If he put in the effort, he could easily become a top hero.

But he wouldn't be a good one.

This is where he belongs. Hitoshi will live his dream in the light, showing the world exactly what he can become. Kakashi will support him from the shadows, doing everything in his power to give his little brother what he deserves. That's the way it should be, and that's exactly what he's worked for all this time.

He arrives on his street and is about to sneak back into his shop, when he notices the car idling at the end of the road. It's an old, nondescript car with a plain design, and two older individuals quietly chat from their spots in the front seats. They're dressed in plain clothes and their outside appearance suggests a quiet, harmless couple.

Nezu. It must be. He's really concerned enough to send *police officers* to watch him?

Kakashi's eyelids droop even further downwards. It appears he can't go to bed just yet. There's always more work to do.

—

"You look exhausted," Hitoshi says bluntly. He bounces a packet of fertilizer in his hand and then puts it back on the display shelf.

Kakashi *feels* exhausted. He doesn't think he got even two hours of

sleep last night. It's strange. He used to be *ANBU*, and their whole job was constant stress. Still though, he feels like he's being bombarded on all sides with constant tasks to complete and appearances to keep up. There's no use in complaining though. He grits his teeth and bears it.

"Are you saying I don't look like my usual bright and lively self?"

Hitoshi rolls his eyes. "Get more sleep."

"Look who's talking."

"I'm serious, Kakashi," his brother says, placing his hands on the counter. "You look terrible. You're doing too much."

It's probably not a good sign if Hitoshi can tell that much. He tries again to brush it off.

"Arbor day is coming up," he says lightly. "You wouldn't want to deny the people their precious seedlings, would you?"

This time, Hitoshi whirls around with pure, genuine irritation in his tone. "I mean it, Kakashi. You're clearly overworking yourself. You need to calm down. Take a break."

Kakashi blinks. It appears he can't just dance around the issue. "You're right," he says softly. "I am very busy these days. But your brother will be just fine, so no need to worry, ne?"

Hitoshi looks down. "You know... I'm here for you. You know that, right? If there's anything you need help with, if there's anything you want to tell me... I'll always be right here."

Is Hitoshi really that worried about him? Kakashi vows to hide it better. Maybe he should invest in some sort of concealer.

"Well, if you're offering..." Kakashi ruffles his brother's hair, and then promptly dumps a bag of dirt and a trowel at his feet. "I have twelve saplings needed for tomorrow. Get potting!"

"I wish you would talk to me," Hitoshi murmurs, as he takes the trowel.

Kakashi winces and pretends not to hear. "Sorry, did you say something?"

"It's nothing."

Chapter End Notes

Kakashi, get some rest already.

Collapse

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hitoshi reaches for his tanto as he creeps over the crumbling cement.

“Stay alert,” Aizawa orders, pausing just below a shattered window.
“Someone’s here.”

“Someone’s here?” Hitoshi flicks his eyes towards the window, but he doesn’t see anything.

“I saw a shadow,” Aizawa says tersely. “It could have been nothing, but stay on guard.”

This was supposed to be a simple information gathering mission. The Shie Hassaikai raid is coming up, and they need all the intel they can get in order to have it go smoothly. For that reason, Aizawa brought him to one of the few bases they had learned about in order to safely scout the Yakuza from a distance and then report back. Unfortunately, from the cracked walls and door hanging off its hinges, someone has already gotten here first.

Hitoshi has a good idea of who it is.

He’s heard of the murderous vigilante Katana. Who hasn’t? Named for the sword that he uses to take the lives of numerous Yakuza members, Katana is deadly, efficient and utterly ruthless. He doesn’t leave any survivors, just a bloody trail of corpses, and his body count numbers in the high thirties. And although so far, he has only seemed to target the Yakuza, it doesn’t mean he’s not a threat.

Katana is supposedly quirkless. If he has a quirk, he’s given no indication of having used it yet. This makes him a pretty inconvenient matchup, as Aizawa fights best against those who are overly reliant on their quirks. And if Katana does have a surprise weapon that he can pull out any time he feels like it, it makes him even more of a danger than he already is. Although if he’s really been defeating entire bases of Yakuza members *quirkless*...

Hitoshi tightens his grip on his tanto.

“I’m heading in,” Aizawa says, from his place just outside the door.

“We’re going to scout the area then report back. If we run into anyone, you are not to engage. I’ll deal with it.”

“It’s Katana, isn’t it,” Hitoshi says.

“It’s not a certainty yet,” Aizawa says calmly, “and I want you to be ready for anything–”

“But we *know* it’s Katana.”

He presses his lips together. “If someone is here, then yes, it’s most likely Katana. Hitoshi, I want you to stay behind me. If I tell you to evacuate, you evacuate.”

“I’m not going to leave you,” Hitoshi protests. “And Katana only kills Yakuza members anyways. He’ll probably just leave if he sees us.”

“Katana is a lethal vigilante with a body count growing by the day. He needs to be stopped, and I’m certain he will not come in easily. Besides, he also doesn’t tend to leave any witnesses. I want you to be very careful, Hitoshi. People like that... They might believe they’re doing good, but in truth, those are the actions of a villain.”

If anyone deserves to die, it’s the Shie Hassaikai, but Hitoshi gets it. Killing should always be the last resort, and being so willing to dole out death isn’t good, it’s evil.

“I understand, sensei,” he says simply.

“Good,” Aizawa replies. “Follow me.”

They slip through the door into the abandoned building. It’s in terrible condition, and not only due to the clear signs of a fight. There’s a large crater in the ceiling providing them a view of the room upstairs, and broken furniture teeters against pockmarked walls, but there’s also molding corners and visible water damage. Hitoshi creeps forward with great trepidation as the floorboards creak ominously beneath their feet. In fact, the whole building seems to be groaning.

“This whole thing seems unstable,” Hitoshi mutters.

Aizawa grimaces. “It most likely is. We’ll do a quick look and then get out.”

Hitoshi pokes the dusty couch. There’s a folded sheet of paper hidden in its depths, but when he pulls it out, it reveals only a simple grocery

list. On it are a bunch of common kitchen items and the words ‘don’t forget the eggs’ written and underlined twice at the bottom of the page. He pockets the list and continues searching.

Nothing on the table. Nothing in the top drawer, middle, or bottom—oh.

“That’s a lot of guns,” he comments.

Aizawa turns around from the far side of the room. “Don’t touch them. We’ll come back and clean up later if necessary.”

Hitoshi nods and silently shuts the drawer once more.

There’s really nothing else except splintered wood and dusty cushions. Hitoshi moves towards the far side of the room, all the while listening to the house groan out its distress. It sounds downright concerning. He’ll be glad to be out of here. This whole place is actually kind of creepy, like some old abandoned ghost house.

He looks up towards the entryway leading to the staircase. They’ll probably have to go upstairs and search for any other possible information the Yakuza could have left before clearing out. That and check just to make sure Katana isn’t up there. Hitoshi moves towards the arched opening and—

There’s a shadow at the top of the stairs.

It’s difficult to make out exact details at first, but one thing becomes immediately clear. The blank white of the individual’s mask. It’s an eerie bone white with no details, just small cutouts for the eyes and mouth. Shadows fall over each harsh angle, casting half of the face into darkness.

The other half is lit in lurid white by a stray beam of light streaming in from the shattered wall. Past the mask, the light streams on, hitting another object and giving off the menacing shine of silver.

On his back lies a single, sharpened katana.

“It’s Katana,” Hitoshi calls urgently. “Katana is on the stairs.”

The figure on the stairs stiffens, just as the building gives another loud groan, and then a particularly alarming creaking noise. Bits of dust fall from the ceiling, and then a board gives way and slams down hard on the other side of the room near his teacher.

“Sensei!” Hitoshi starts, head turning slightly, and that’s enough time for Katana to fly down the stairs, sword raised. Hitoshi has barely enough time to get his tanto up to block.

It’s in that instant that he knows.

It shouldn’t be, it *can’t* be, but Hitoshi has practiced kenjutsu since he was ten, bukiyutsu even longer. He spars with one person and one person only, and he could recognize these movements even deaf and blind.

Thrust. Parry. Jab. Sidestep.

It’s a rhythm as familiar as his own heartbeat. It’s a good thing, too. He’s been trained to keep this up even while drugged and half-asleep, which he’s feeling mildly grateful for because if not for the pattern ingrained into his soul, he would be eating the end of a sword right at this very moment. Hitoshi is feeling incredibly out of it. He thinks he might even be hallucinating, because how else could Katana possibly be...

Back step. Circle. Horizontal cut.

“Get out of there, Hitoshi!” Aizawa orders. His teacher is almost at his side, but Hitoshi’s still engaged in the fight. He wants to tell him that he can’t extricate himself just yet, that this is the part of the fight where his opponent presses—

Slash. Sweep back. Block.

The bright silver blades crash against each other, meeting once more in the air. Hitoshi presses firmly against the katana, gritting his teeth as he strains to bring the other sword to the floor. Across from him, the featureless white mask stares back.

His feet automatically shift into position as he readies himself for the next few moves. He can already see the course of their fight. Katana kicks out at the leg, slashing downwards, and Hitoshi jumps back.

This exchange is drawing to a close. He can predict the following motions as easily as breathing. Katana balances his weight on his back leg, about to lunge forward. In his mind, the motion shutters, the first step in the final sequence of this dance. Hitoshi shuts his eyes to blurs of colour, mentally tracing over the conclusion of the fight. He sees the lunge, the spinning dodge underneath, the jab step, bringing the tip of the sword to rest against his neck, and then the eye-creasing

smile as his opponent wins yet again–

There's the lunge. Hitoshi dances sideways, bringing up his tanto to sweep across. The spinning dodge. Hitoshi tries to spin with it, catching his elbow and pushing up just like he's taught. His sword is raising but he already knows he's too slow. He's always too slow.

This is how it ends.

Hitoshi is still turning as his opponent steps and jabs at his unprotected neck. He knows this move well, he's been on the receiving end of it for years. He knows that the sword will come inches from his skin and then retreat, returning to its sheathe as he's chided on his reflexes and footwork–

There's no blade, but a hard hit to the head.

Seeping inky blackness.

Hitoshi has barely enough time to feel a deep ripping sense of betrayal as his own brother knocks him unconscious.

–

“You're up.”

Hitoshi groans as he awakens, eyes squinting into the bright infirmary lights. He blinks for a couple seconds before refocusing his gaze on his teacher, who peers back at him with his lips pressed tightly in barely hidden relief.

“I'm– What happened?”

His throat is dry, and he wants a glass of water, but he doesn't dare ask in fear of delaying an explanation.

“Katana knocked you out.” Aizawa tells him gravely. “You were able to hold him off for a surprisingly long time, but he got around you and knocked you unconscious.” His teacher sighs. “You should have attempted a retreat, but I understand that wasn't possible with the position you were in. I apologize for not getting to you in time.”

Aizawa continues with his apology, but Hitoshi isn't listening. Everything is all coming back to him. The building. The fight. The conclusion.

Kakashi.

As much as Hitoshi doesn't want to believe it, he can't live in denial forever. Katana is undeniably Kakashi.

Kakashi, his brother. Kakashi, who loves him.

Kakashi, a murderer.

Kakashi, who *hurt him*.

Hitoshi harbours doubts about his brother, but if you'd asked him a day ago, he would have said with complete and utter certainty that Kakashi would never intentionally hurt him. Now though? The bump on the back of his head says otherwise.

His hair catches between his fingers as he dazedly feels for the spot where Kakashi demonstrated the complete betrayal of his trust.

"What happened after?" Hitoshi asks. His head feels stuffed with cotton.

"After you were knocked out, I was finally able to get over to your side. I attempted to take you out, and managed to get you out the door. I was also doing my best to keep Katana cornered, but it was difficult as the building was highly unstable. You saw the condition it was in."

Shattered windows, punctured walls. Deep gouges in the floor. Hitoshi pictures the scene. The Yakuza members relax within their base, counting coins, preparing groceries. There's no sound to warn them of what is to come, no visual cue. He strikes silently, lashing out like a viper, and then there's a body on the floor. Red blood paints the walls, and they all fall before him.

Hitoshi visualizes it all too easily. He's seen the crime scene photos.

He knows what Kakashi is capable of.

"And so what happened to Katana?" He feels like he's floating, high above the deadweight of his still body anchored to the bed.

Kakashi is his brother. Kakashi is a murderer. How many people has he killed now? How many people can Hitoshi excuse?

"In our fight, we cut a support. The building was already highly unstable and we just hastened it. It collapsed afterwards, but I was able to escape."

He sees the scene from up above. He's in the bed, hands gripping the sheets but unable to feel their warmth. Aizawa's at his side, lips still moving and a terrible dread sweeps through Hitoshi's body.

"Katana was still in the building when it came down. Unfortunately, he died in the collapse."

Hitoshi plummets back to earth.

—

Aizawa is worried about him, but Hitoshi begs to go home, and pushes so hard that his teacher reluctantly accepts. He doesn't say anything about Kakashi. He can't, not when Kakashi is— when he might be—

He's not dead. He's *not* dead. He can't be. Kakashi is amazing, Kakashi is undefeatable. He can't be dead.

Kakashi is also a murderer who has a body count of nearly forty people, but Hitoshi can't think about that right now. Kakashi is his brother, and right now, he needs his help. He has to need his help, because anything else means that he's—

Hitoshi jams his key into the lock, and jiggles it viciously. It sticks for a second and he hisses in frustration, but then the lock catches and Hitoshi is able to shove the door open. The flower shop is clearly empty, and the lights are off. He flicks them on, striding past the light switch and through the aisles.

"Kakashi," he demands. "Kakashi! Where are you? *Kakashi!*"

He passes behind the desk to blow through the second door, entering into the apartment section of the building. It's dark in here too, and no one is in the bedroom, bathroom or kitchen—

Wait.

In his brother's terrible handwriting, a note lying on the kitchen counter explains that Kakashi will be gone for the next couple of days. He has a lot of jobs at the moment and he's very busy, it reads. Sorry he won't make it to dinner!

By the time Hitoshi finishes reading, the note is badly crumpled in his crushing fists. The aching grip of relief smothers his lungs. "I hate you," he whispers feelingly, then louder. "*I hate you.*"

It's not true. It's *not true*. He doesn't hate his brother, but at the same time, knowing that he's alive somewhere, probably hiding out and healing from heavy injuries... On his own, on the run, unable to go to a hospital due to—

Being a wanted lethal vigilante.

He thinks about it a lot in the following days that his brother is away.

"You've been distracted lately," Aizawa says, frowning.

"Sorry," Hitoshi replies, but it's true. Kakashi is always on his mind. Is he alone? Is he okay? Is he hurting?

Has he hurt anyone since?

Hitoshi forcibly drags his mind away from his brother's current whereabouts. "I'm listening now."

"You're worried and stressed," his teacher correctly deduces. "Is it about what happened at the Yakuza base?" His lips turn down. "You said it was fine, but I should have spoken to your guardians after all. It's important to speak to someone after stressful events, and your guardians deserve to know what happened in order to best support you."

Aizawa, speaking to *Kakashi*? That sounded like the worst possible idea. He imagines one of Kakashi's misplaced attempts at comfort, and barely manages to keep down a hysterical laugh. What would he even say? *I'm sorry some random person who is definitely not me knocked you unconscious?* As much as he wants to see Kakashi again, he's dreading it too. Hitoshi doesn't want to be calmed down by the person who is the instigator of all his stress in the first place.

"I'm fine," Hitoshi says, but from the look Aizawa is giving him, he's not doing a very good job at selling it.

"You're not fine, and that's okay. You're my student, and I want you to be able to come to me when something is wrong. So, I'm going to ask again, Hitoshi. Is everything okay? And is there anything I can do to help?"

The stress must be getting to him. He can feel tears building in the corner of his eyes, and furiously ignores them in the hopes that they'll just go away. He's not okay. He's not okay, but he doesn't know what to say.

"Do you think he's unredeemable?" He blurts.

His teacher's eyes widen. "What?"

"Katana. I mean, he murdered all those people. He... he wasn't a good person. That's why you were trying so hard to catch him, right? You cornered him in that building even though it was collapsing..."

"That's... not what I thought you would say," Aizawa says awkwardly. He clears his throat. "But yes, you're right that I was trying very hard to catch him. Most vigilantes believe they're acting as heroes, but Katana was guilty of multiple cases of first degree murder. He was a violent extremist acting more as a villain than anything else, and he needed to be stopped."

You're not a villain, Kakashi would tell him. You're my brother, and I'm certain you'll become an amazing hero.

Hitoshi's not a villain. But Kakashi...

In his chest, he can feel his heart breaking.

The heroic thing to do, the *right* thing to do, would be to report Kakashi. He could tell his teacher everything right here and now. Katana is alive. Katana is Hound. Katana is Kakashi.

Katana is my brother.

With his heart in his throat, he opens his mouth to speak—

"However," Aizawa continues, and Hitoshi's mouth clacks closed. "I would find it very difficult to deem him *unredeemable*."

Aizawa's words hang in the air, causing Hitoshi to tense up. It feels like he's on the edge of a precipice. Katana, or rather Kakashi, has committed heinous acts. He's taken lives and caused destruction. He's a *villain*. How could there be any possibility of redemption for someone like that?

He ignores the kind brother who supports him and makes him smile. The brother who would do absolutely anything to protect him.

"But... how?" Hitoshi manages to ask, his voice barely a whisper.

Aizawa lets out a tired sigh, his gaze fixed on Hitoshi. "Listen, Hitoshi. As heroes, we're expected to believe in the potential for redemption, even those who've done terrible things. But I'll be honest, I've dealt

with some very tough cases. It's our responsibility to ensure they face the consequences. I can't say for sure if they'll ever turn their lives around, but what I do know is this: Katana should've been apprehended and held accountable for his crimes. But he didn't deserve to die, and I regret how it went down. Now, whether he could've chosen a different path in the future... well, we'll never really know for certain."

They'll never know, not if Hitoshi stays silent.

But if he gives Kakashi one more chance... If Kakashi could just tell him the truth and choose a different path...

One more chance, Hitoshi tells himself. He'll give Kakashi one more chance to explain himself. But after that—

Oh, Kashi-nii.

—

On the third day of barging into the flower shop every day after school, he finally runs smack dab into his brother.

"*Ka-Kakashi?*" He stutters.

If his brother had looked sick before, he looks positively corpse-like now. His *eye bags* have bags, and his skin is pale and sallow. He looks weak and exhausted. Hitoshi might even be able to take him in a spar, and that's saying something.

Kakashi smiles forcibly, in a movement that's clearly paining him. "Yo."

There's white noise rushing in his ears. Hitoshi doesn't know what to say. He feels like he's choking. He feels like he's dying.

"Hi," he says dully.

Kakashi's gaze drops down. His hands grope the countertop aimlessly, searching for something to do. They land on a pair of garden scissors. Inside the shop, the only sound is the squeaking of the hinges as Kakashi pretends to test their sharpness.

"I'm sorry I was away," his brother says, finally snapping the scissors closed. "Work caught up to me and I was very busy. Why don't we have dinner another time this week?"

“Dinner.” Hitoshi repeats. There’s something brewing inside him, like shallow bursts of magma in his gut.

“That’s right. Why don’t we go to that nice place you like, hm? The one with the fancy drinks.”

“What work?”

His brother’s mask crinkles as his eyebrows draw in. “It’s not important. Ah, but why don’t we go to a cafe instead? It’s been a while since we’ve had time to talk. We can even do the cat cafe.”

Hitoshi wants to scream. Screw the *fucking* cat cafe. He wants answers.

“You never tell me *anything*,” Hitoshi hisses.

Kakashi sighs. “I don’t want you to worry about it, Hitoshi.”

That’s it. He stomps forward, face fixed in a rictus of rage. “I *know* something’s wrong. Stop dancing around it and just tell me!”

His brother’s gaze finally snaps up, eyes hardening as they meet Hitoshi’s. “*I said*, it’s nothing.”

Hitoshi’s eyes are tearing up again, and he can’t stop himself. He could throw it all in Kakashi’s face. He knows about all his lies– he could expose them all, scream his throat out and force Kakashi to repent. The red hot lava is bubbling up and toxic fumes are circling his head. He wants to strangle his brother, he wants to *break* things. Ceramic flower pots line the shop walls. He could kick them down, throw them across the room just to see them shatter.

He barely reigns it in. Because underneath all the fire, there’s something else. He could expose everything now, but if he does that, certain truths will never be revealed. In his heart, he wonders. *Do you trust me? Are you good? If I gave you one more chance...*

If his brother is still good, then he has to stop. If Hitoshi begs him, will he apologize? Will he finally let Hitoshi in? He’s always been the protector, the guardian shielding Hitoshi from the world. He’s always been grateful, how can’t he be when Kakashi does so much for him? But he never wanted that. All he ever wanted was Kakashi’s trust. His love.

He just wants *Kakashi*.

But as much as he loves- hates- *loves* his brother, there comes a time when a choice must be made. Hitoshi is a hero now. He has a responsibility, and if Kakashi really isn't the hero Hitoshi thought he was...

One more chance, a voice at the back of his mind whispers. *Just one more.*

"Please," Hitoshi says, voice pitching desperately. He's straight up begging now. "I'm your brother, you know you can tell me anything. *Please* Kakashi, just tell me, and we can fix this. This isn't right, if you would just talk to me-! If you would just talk to me, we could- we could-"

His voice hitches.

Kakashi's smile is pained, but his eyes have softened. "You're right," he says. "I've been overworking myself lately. I'm always very busy and working too many jobs, so it's probably time to cut back a little, hm?"

"You- you're cutting back?" Hitoshi feels wrong footed. Is it really that easy?

"It's probably for the best. And I *do* trust you, Hitoshi. You're right, you're my brother and I should have talked to you sooner. Why don't you help me?"

His eyes are tearing up again, but it's for a different reason this time. "You really mean it? Of course I'll help. I'll always help you. Kashi-nii."

"Ah, good." Kakashi hesitates, then ruffles Hitoshi's hair. Hitoshi closes his eyes in relief, leaning into his brother's touch. There's a chance. If Kakashi really means it, if he's giving up his vigilantism and will finally *talk* to him... It won't be the same as what they used to have, and they'll have to go through some hard discussions, but *it's a chance*.

And then Kakashi is speaking again. "I can tell you about some of my tougher customers and the errands I run. And I'll cut down my hours. Would you help me with making a new schedule for the shop? Reduced hours, or maybe I'll close on Mondays."

It feels like he's been doused in cold water. "I thought you..." Hitoshi trails off.

I thought you trusted me. I thought you wouldn't hurt me.

I thought you loved me.

“Hm?”

“Nothing,” Hitoshi says, helpless rage and despair returning to sit like solidified magma in his gut.

“It’s nothing.”

—

He’s been reading the same paragraph for the last ten minutes, and he can’t make sense of a single word on the page. His knee is bouncing in agitation. The front right chair leg is slightly shorter than the rest, making a metal pinging sound each time it impacts the floor. He doesn’t want to annoy Aizawa, but every time he tries to stop, his leg resumes bouncing seconds later.

Hitoshi puts down the paper. Picks it back up again. He tries to refocus on the paragraph.

–White Fang and Snipe set to be partnered for this assignment. Primary infiltration will take place with the main team. Afterwards they will separate, heading towards the west corridor–

He doesn’t know how he’s going to tell Aizawa. Does he just say it? Blurt it out? Once the truth is out, there’s no going back. Kakashi will finally be facing justice, for better or for worse.

Hitoshi wonders exactly what will happen. Kakashi’s going to be arrested, and they’re going to take it to court. There will be a trial, and unless Kakashi does something exceptionally clever, he’s going to be determined guilty and go to jail. It’s *Kakashi*, so of course he could probably find a way out of it, but if Hitoshi’s the one accusing him...

And even if deep down it feels like it’s a betrayal, it’s *not*. It’s the right thing to do. It’s the only thing to do.

Besides, Kakashi betrayed him first.

Maybe if he tells himself that enough times, he’ll eventually believe it.

Hitoshi shifts in his seat, then sinks back down again.

But it’s *Kakashi*. How can Hitoshi– how can he just turn on him like

that? And even if Kakashi is a villain, a murderer, a criminal who needs to be caught and thrown in prison, he's still his *brother*.

Katana only killed Yakuza members, Hitoshi reasons desperately. He may not be the hero Hitoshi had always thought he was, he may not be *good*, but he's not evil either. Right? *Right?* Hitoshi had sworn to only give him one more chance, but maybe if he pushes Kakashi more, forces him to stop, then everything will be okay again.

Hitoshi slams the paper back down onto the table.

"Sensei, about Katana—"

"Hitoshi, what's going on—"

They both pause and collect themselves.

"You go first," Hitoshi says, nerves faltering.

Aizawa frowns. "What about Katana? Were you reading the papers?"

"What papers?"

His teacher squints at him. "I suppose not, then. I was speaking of the files on Katana and his crimes. They were recently declassified."

"Wh-what were they about?" Hitoshi feels vaguely light-headed. "All the Yakuza that he, uh. Murdered?"

"It went into detail on some of the bases he infiltrated as well as specific names and methods for his victims, yes. Some of the villains he fought, his standard tactics, police officer deaths—"

"What did you just say?"

Hitoshi is standing now, hands pressed against the desk. He leans forward with all his weight bearing down, like he might fall without its support. Out to the side, something catches his eye. There's a faint reflection in the window that shows his ragged form, hair wild and eyes frantic.

Aizawa pauses, caught off guard. "You seem to be very interested in Katana."

"The police officers," Hitoshi presses. "What did you mean about the police officer deaths?"

His teacher's eyes are narrowed, and his next sentences come slowly and warily. "It wasn't perfectly clear, but there were two officers who died, either caught in the cross-fire of his attack on a minor villain, or cut down by Katana while he made his escape. Hitoshi, is there something wrong? Is there a reason you're so concerned with Katana?"

"Sensei," Hitoshi starts again. He stops.

Aizawa sits up straighter, staring Hitoshi down. "I know you were concerned about Katana as a person and his redeemability. What I had to say before still holds. He may have thought of himself as a hero, but his actions were villainous. Killing is a last resort option. And murder is never the answer, whether they're criminals or innocents. As for whether he could have changed, I'm not sure. He should have been brought to justice, but it's regrettable that he died." Aizawa's lips twist as he finishes with a murmur. "Still, he killed some good men."

Hitoshi's never heard his heartbeat sound this audible before. He can practically hear the blood gushing out with every frantic pump.

Kakashi- Kakashi killed-

"If you need to talk about it later, we can certainly do so," Aizawa says, eyes serious. "What happened that day was a tremendously stressful event, and I'd be glad to spend time working it out with you. But for now, the raid is tomorrow. Are you still feeling ready to participate?"

"Yes," Hitoshi blurts. "I'm ready. I can do it."

"Good. After the raid, then." Aizawa nods decisively. "Let's run over the plan one more time--"

There's something wrong with Hitoshi's body. There's a tight, rumbling pain in his stomach and he feels like he's going to throw up. It's getting hard to breathe. Are his lungs collapsing?

Aizawa has to be lying. There's no way Kakashi would ever kill police officers. Sometimes you have to kill to protect people, that was what Kakashi always used to say, but what does killing cops do? It isn't protection, it's just murder. It's *wrong*.

Kakashi, Hitoshi wants to cry. *Kakashi Kakashi why why why Kakashi-*

He gave Kakashi a chance, and he spurned it. He gave him another,

and he finds out his brother has been killing innocents.

I love you I hate you why why why–

Hitoshi has no more excuses to give. There can be no more chances.

He'll tell Aizawa after the raid.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you're ready.

Raid

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was a bad idea right from the beginning.

Kakashi has spent the last week operating on maybe three hours of sleep a night. He's still injured from the building collapse, he hasn't planned this through, and he's currently running on pure adrenaline and energy drinks. They're no chakra pills, but they do the trick.

Well, now he's here, cornered once again by his little brother, along with the Pro-Hero Snipe.

Yeah, this was a terrible idea.

At least he knew better than to go out as Katana. No, he's just here as the friendly vigilante Hound, ideally going unnoticed, but ultimately not a major threat. Still, being caught is certainly not good. Being caught with Hitoshi here is even worse.

All he wanted to do was to protect Hitoshi. He's been hearing about the raid for weeks now, and he knows that Hitoshi and a few of his classmates had been slated to join in. It's not that he doesn't have confidence in Hitoshi's skills— his brother is a perfectly capable individual. But it's his brother. Of course he's going to worry. And if he can alleviate those worries by following his brother around in his vigilante persona and taking out all the threats standing in his way before Hitoshi has to deal with them, why wouldn't he?

In retrospect, the reason is fairly obvious. It's precisely because then he wouldn't have had to deal with a situation like *this*.

Hitoshi stares at him from across the room, eyes wide. Even though his hands are clenched into tight fists, Kakashi can't help but notice that his brother's hands are trembling. He does his best to tuck away the slight tinge of hurt that filters through his cold situational assessment. Is Hitoshi really scared of *him*?

They could have been a hero, Hitoshi had said once, about Hound, *but instead—*

Instead they're here. Two brothers facing off, one hero, one vigilante.

Hitoshi is biting the underside of his lip and his face is pale and waxy in the underground light. He looks unwell. He looks *terrified*. Kakashi doesn't know what to do. Hound is his friendliest persona, and yet his brother is already scared of him.

The only thing he can do is take off, except his chest is aching and his leg is badly injured. Snipe and Hitoshi block the only exit. He shifts the weight off his aching leg, even as he moves carefully to make more room, keeping his hands in plain view. He could find a way to escape, certainly, but doing so nonlethally while keeping his cover intact would take a lot more effort than he's willing to expend right at this moment. It might be better to just allow himself to get caught then escape later.

Hitoshi's mouth opens, then closes, jaw desperately working. He takes a step forward and stutters to a halt.

Snipe's gun is steadily trained on him.

Kakashi swallows.

"Look kid," Snipe says gruffly, weapon still raised. "You're a vigilante and we're duty bound to bring you in. You may think you're doing the right thing, but not only is vigilantism illegal, you're untrained and sooner or later, somebody's going to get hurt. If you come in quietly, we can strike you a deal. Get you some help, maybe even find a way to get you some proper training and a license."

He extends his free hand, even as the barrel of his gun dips downwards. "So what do you say?"

The easy thing to do would be to agree. Kakashi could, no, *should* take the hand, accept the offer. His body is beaten and battered, and he was already planning on going in with minimal fight. So what does it matter if he lies, fakes actual consideration of the positively lenient offer. Kakashi lies all the time. He can fake changing his ways. He can pretend to be star struck by his potential future as a hero. This is the easy thing to do.

But since when has Kakashi ever made anything easy for himself?

"Come on," Snipe says. "There'll be some legalities, and probably some community service, but this is your chance, kid. You can still become a hero, the right way this time."

"No one would want a hero like me."

Because that's the truth of it. Kakashi's no hero, he knows it well. He'll lie about a lot of things, but he won't ever lie about that.

"You don't know that," Hitoshi blurts out, and Kakashi's head jerks back towards him. His little brother steps forward again, eyes flashing valiantly, and Kakashi is taken aback by the fervour in his voice. "Why would you think that?"

Hitoshi's hand drops to his lips in horror, as if surprised by his own audacity.

Kakashi is surprised too. He really didn't think Hitoshi would feel so strongly, especially not about someone he doesn't even know.

"Ah, it's really not for me, though," he explains slowly, eyes fixed on his panting brother. "I feel—"

Hitoshi cuts him off again. "It doesn't matter what you've done, it *doesn't matter how you feel!* Why can't you just- just take the chance? We're giving you this opportunity— Why can't you *make* yourself be a hero? You could! You *could*, but you're *choosing* not to be, and I don't understand—"

Kakashi stares at him wide-eyed.

Is this really what Hitoshi thinks of him?

"White Fang," Snipe says, shock gripping his voice, before command forces itself back into his tone. "I can see you're feeling strongly about this, but I need you to calm down—"

Hitoshi doesn't calm down, he just barrels onwards. "You can still be good," he babbles. "Even if you're not a- a *hero*, you can still be good, so please, why can't you- can't you just *stop*? Please, if you'd just stop then even if you don't come in- even then—"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Kakashi whispers, feeling so very out of his depth. He's completely lost in a way that he's never had to deal with before.

He doesn't know what's causing this, but he still has to help Hitoshi. Normally he'd place his hands on his shoulders to ground him, tell him to follow his breathing and listen to his voice. He jerkily makes a motion to start towards his brother, but stops. He can't help Hitoshi, not like this. Thankfully, the hero does it for him.

“Calm down,” Snipe orders again. “Breathe.”

Hitoshi gathers himself shakily. When he opens his eyes again, he looks no less frantic than he did previously. At least his words are coming out steadily.

“I need you to understand. I need you to *try*. What you’ve done is— it’s horrible, but you can still learn! You’re smart, you can do it if you just had someone to teach you. They- they taught me, and they were *right*. It’s not enough to only protect the people you care about, we’re *heroes*, we have to look after everyone.”

His brother’s words are coming faster and faster, and Kakashi has a sinking feeling in his stomach. He’s not sure exactly what it is, but he knows he needs to stop his brother before something happens that neither of them will be able to take back. *Hitoshi*, he wants to say, *Hitoshi, please*, but he can’t, he can’t say anything—

“You don’t have to be a hero, but at least stop what you’re doing,” Hitoshi pleads. “It isn’t right, you have to know that, it’s people’s *lives*—”

Kakashi inhales sharply.

“And you can be good, I know you can,” his brother finishes, “so *Ka-Hound*, please—”

Snipe’s gun is raised again. “White Fang,” he says, tone utterly calm. Dangerous. “Do you know something about Hound’s identity?”

Hitoshi’s face pales. “I-” he stutters. “I-”

“You were trying to say a name,” Snipe says. His voice shifts into something more comforting, although it hardly alleviates any of Kakashi’s worries. Hitoshi knows. *His brother knows*. How much? He seems to know about Kakashi, and Katana as well...

“I didn’t- I didn’t mean—”

“It’s okay,” Snipe tells him reassuringly. “We can talk about it later. I understand what you were trying to say.” He gives Hitoshi one last comforting glance before turning towards Kakashi. His once warmth filled gaze is now hard and utterly unforgiving. The muzzle of his gun is pointed unerringly in Kakashi’s direction.

“*Katana*. You are under arrest for—”

Kakashi doesn't give him time to finish the sentence. He immediately layers a genjutsu over him and jerks to the side, dodging the bullet that pierces through his illusionary clone. Hitoshi stumbles back, hand going to his tanto, but Kakashi ignores him, pushing through the throbbing pain to chop Snipe on the back of the neck. The Pro-Hero goes down, unconscious.

Kakashi had been hoping not to have to use more specific sharingan genjutsus as Hound, but he had also not realized Hitoshi was aware of his identity, so it's the least of his problems right now. Kami, *Hitoshi*. His brother *knows*. It's not the end of the world though, he can still salvage this, right? He turns back towards his brother and—

In the pale lighting of the underground base, Hitoshi's purple hair looks washed out and waxen. His pupils are dilated, and even as he squares himself up into a fighting stance, he looks small and terrified.

"*Hitoshi*," Kakashi starts.

"Stop," his brother whispers.

The light reflects off the shining silver sword pointed straight at his heart.

What does he do? What *can* he do? Hitoshi knows now. He knows, and he's scared. He's scared of *Kakashi*.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Kakashi says, gentling his tone. He keeps his hands away from his weapons.

"You did before."

It's partially true, but Kakashi had been careful. When he ran into him as Katana, he had been pleasantly surprised by Hitoshi's skill, allowing a quick spar before knocking him out for an easier getaway. He had made sure not to give Hitoshi any long-term injuries of course, ensuring that his brother would be fine with only a brief headache for his troubles. He'd knocked him out in less than a second. Hitoshi wouldn't have even felt it.

"I'm sorry about that. But I'm not going to hurt you now. Lower your sword, please."

"You knocked Snipe out!"

"He's going to be fine, he'll be back up soon without any injuries at

all. I'm sorry, but I had to do it. He knows I'm Katana now, and that could make me eligible for the death penalty--"

"They wouldn't kill you," Hitoshi yells, "because killing isn't what heroes do! It's what *you* do! *You* murder people! I thought- I thought you wanted to save people, I thought you wanted to protect them like I do! I looked up to you, Kakashi, and instead you're running around and slaughtering whole Yakuza bases, all those people--"

Kakashi grimaces. "I know I've kept a lot from you, and we *will* talk, I promise. But I need to go right now. For Katana, it's the death penalty or Tartarus, so Hitoshi, please--"

The sword is still in his hand, but it's no longer held in a proper swordsman grip. Instead, Hitoshi is gesticulating angrily, face flushed, with tears welling up in the corners of his eyes. It seems like he hasn't heard Kakashi at all as he continues ranting.

"I know you, you probably think it's okay because they're Yakuza, but they're still people, Kakashi! Even if they weren't *innocent*, they were still-- You can't just kill them! And you- you did all those things when we were younger, illegal things, criminal things, I know you did." Hitoshi gives him a dark glare. "So *you* deserve to die, too. Is that what you're saying?"

Kakashi feels like his soul is seeping out of his body. "I didn't realize you knew," he says blankly.

He didn't realize Hitoshi knew, and he certainly didn't realize his brother would take it this hard. In his dreams, he'd feared Hitoshi's rejection, dreaded the loss of his love, but he'd never fully envisioned this moment occurring. His brother stares back at him with disappointment and rage swirling in his eyes. It feels like a tight hand squeezing his heart.

"I knew you were Hound from the beginning," Hitoshi spits. "I waited- I kept on waiting for you to tell me, but you never did. I thought if you trusted me, if you- if you *loved*--" He cuts himself off.

Hitoshi is crying now, and Kakashi thinks he would probably cry too if he could muster up the tears. But instead he's just still. Frozen.

"You kept on lying to me," Hitoshi sobs. "Every time, you just continued *lying*. And I thought you were- I really thought you were a *hero*. But you're Katana too, you hid that from me too, you hurt me, and you killed everyone, and even then--"

"I love you," Kakashi blurts out desperately. "You're my brother, and I love you, Hitoshi—"

"I love you," Hitoshi repeats, tears streaming down his face. "I thought you loved me. I thought- I love you, I love you, *I hate you so much, Kakashi—*"

I hate you, Kakashi had told his father once, even as his heart had screamed out, *I love you I love you please don't leave me I love you—*

"I'm sorry," Kakashi says helplessly, because what else can he say? Everything is falling to pieces. "I still love you. I'm sorry I didn't tell you, but you're my brother and I love you. Hitoshi, listen to me. Everything's going to be okay." He can't exactly promise *that*, but he still wills it to be true.

Hitoshi's shoulders are shaking as he tries to choke down his heaving breaths. "You can fix this, Kashi-nii, you can- you can- You always make everything okay, so please—" Hiccuping gasps interrupt his speech. "Kashi-nii, it's going to be okay, right? You- you didn't kill the cops, Aizawa-sensei was lying because you would never—"

He buries his wet face in his hands, cutting off his hitching words.

What can he do? What can he say? Kakashi is at a loss. He's seen Hitoshi cry before. Angry, frustrated tears when he's told off by a teacher, bitter lonely sniffles when he's bullied at school. Never like this. He's never seen his brother so utterly... broken. All this time, he kept Hitoshi in the dark, fearing that he would hate him if he knew the truth, but looking at the consequences? It was never worth this.

He needs to fix this. *Hitoshi* needs him to fix this. And that starts with doing what Hitoshi always begged him to do. He needs to tell the truth.

"I'm sorry, but it wasn't a lie. One police officer did die due to collateral damage during one of my battles. It wasn't my intention for him to be injured, but unfortunately..." Kakashi trails off. Hitoshi won't like it, but he's doing this to prove his honesty. He needs his brother to know that he trusts him, and if that involves telling the hard truths, it's best to rip the bandage off now.

"And as for the other officer, I took him out during my exit. I regret what happened and it wasn't an action I would have taken under normal circumstances, but I was very close to being caught, and I needed to make it out. I really am sorry Hitoshi, but I needed to make

it back to you. I know you don't agree with what I've done, but know that I've always just wanted to protect you. I love you and I trust you." He pleads for Hitoshi to understand, just as he hopes that he manages to convey the truth to his words.

"You- you-" Hitoshi's shoulders shake once more before falling still.

"I was wrong," Kakashi tells him desperately. "I should never have kept this from you. And I'm telling you now."

Hitoshi doesn't answer. He's fallen still. His tanto hangs listlessly at his side, and his eyes are fixed blankly on the floor, boring into the fragmented cement without seeing a single crack. His brother is normally so lively. His purple eyes are constantly moving, rolling in exasperation, or creasing up in laughter at Kakashi's antics. But now? They're dull. They're... dead.

Please, please, he never wanted this—

"Hitoshi," Kakashi says.

His brother is silent.

"Say something."

Still no answer.

Kakashi has to go. It's been a long time now, made even more urgent by the fact that neither Hitoshi nor Snipe have reported in, making it certain that reinforcements are closing in at this very second. Kakashi cannot afford to be caught, not when everything's already so hectic. Hitoshi asked him to fix this, so he will. He can't do it now, but soon. He'll fix this. He has to.

"I'm sorry, Hitoshi," he whispers. "I need to go. You don't have to forgive me, I'll understand if you don't, but— I love you. I'm so sorry, I'll fix this, I promise. I love you, and I'll see you soon, okay?"

Hitoshi doesn't make any movement in recognition of his words, so Kakashi can only send his brother one last agonized look before slipping towards the exit. The sight of his brother, purple hair drooping over his eyes, pallid face and dead-eyed stare... He's only ever wanted to protect Hitoshi. That's all he's ever done. Where did he go so wrong?

I can fix this, Kakashi tells himself as he passes out the doorway. *I*

promise, whatever it takes– I'll protect Hitoshi. I will fix this.

Kakashi pauses on the threshold, readying his genjutsu when–

A gasp.

The slick, familiar sound of a blade being plunged into flesh.

Kakashi whirls around to see the tip of a silver-bladed tanto piercing out the front of Snipe's chest. His brother stands above him, eyes manic and hands shaking as they grip the hilt of the sword. Below him, Snipe's hand spasms, and the gun previously aimed directly at Kakashi clatters uselessly to the ground.

"Keep it steady," Kakashi orders, instructions coming immediately to his tongue. The shock is clearly hitting his brother, but Kakashi doesn't hesitate. He knows this feeling well. The blood trickling down your fingers, the weight of another body sagging against yours, the cold frozen time as the moment stretches on and on, the instinctual urge to flinch away, then your quickening heartbeat as you pray you were somewhere, anywhere but here–

"Hitoshi!" He barks. "Don't remove the blade–"

Hitoshi lets out a gasp and forcefully wrenches out the blade. He stumbles backwards as Snipe collapses to the ground, crimson pooling across the floor.

Damn. *Damn.*

"It's not too late," Kakashi snaps, skidding towards his brother. "Put pressure on the wound, here, use that scarf– Hitoshi. Hitoshi?"

His brother backs away, white knuckled grip still clutching the tanto, and sending red droplets flying. Silent tears pour down his cheeks.

"Hitoshi," Kakashi repeats softly. He approaches slowly, hands by his sides. He reaches out but hesitates, stopping just shy of touching his brother.

"I- I didn't mean to..." Hitoshi trembles uncontrollably as his eyes dart over his blood-stained weapon. He takes another step back, then another, distancing himself from the crumpled form before him. "He was- he was– *Heroes don't kill*, but he was going to–" Hitoshi collapses into himself.

In reality, Kakashi thinks it's more likely that Snipe was aiming to disable rather than kill, but either way, the damage is done. From the growing puddle of blood and the lethal placement of the blade, there's very little chance of Snipe coming out of this alive. His mind works frantically, searching for a solution.

"You can't die, Kashi-nii," Hitoshi tells him through his tears, voice suddenly turning more forceful. "I love you. I'll love you no matter what. I'm sorry, what I said, I didn't mean it because *I still love you*— We can- we can run! We'll go into hiding, and then when it's safe we could even be vigilantes together—"

His hesitation is broken. Kakashi rushes to his brother's side, nudging the sword aside to envelope him in a tight embrace. Hitoshi clings to him desperately, burying his face in Kakashi's shoulder as heaving sobs wrack his body.

"Kashi," he chokes out between gasps for breath. "*Kashi-nii.*"

Kakashi can't even make out the words tumbling past his own lips as he rushes to apologize. He's done so much harm, wronged so many people. He had thought that this new life would grant him the chance at a fresh start, but it would seem all he can do is ruin the lives of the people most precious to him. Even if he spent his whole life on his knees begging for forgiveness, it would never be enough.

Why is he given chance after chance, when all he ever does is squander them? They're family. Family protects, but instead all he does is fail.

Hitoshi is going to run away with him. He's tossing his dreams of heroics to the side for a life of blood and darkness. Kakashi has ruined his life, and now his brother is throwing his own life away in order to be with him.

He can't allow this.

I hate you so much, Hitoshi had sobbed. *You deserve to die, I hate you—*

Once, so many years and a lifetime ago, Kakashi had hated his father as well. They were family, but still he had brushed past him, slammed the door in his face, spat out words he would give anything to take back.

I hate you. I hate you.

You should have died on that mission.

And his father had knelt, grasped Kakashi's tiny hands in his, and held them tightly. *Kakashi*, he had said, in the low rumble that Kakashi can barely recall. *Kakashi*.

What had he said? It's been so long. Still, as Kakashi drops to his knees and takes Hitoshi's hands in his own, he can hear the echo of his father's words.

"I promise," he says, words separated by a generation. "You're my family, and I love you. I promise I'll always protect you, and I promise to make things right."

Sometimes, no matter your intentions, you cause the people you love nothing but grief. *Sometimes*, to protect their hopes and dreams, to protect their life...

You cannot be in it.

A shining blade, tears, a promise. Hateful words, blood painting the floor.

Gently, Kakashi nudges Hitoshi's fingers aside, sliding the silver tanto out of his shaking hands.

There are footsteps in the hall. It would seem that the heroes' back up is finally on their way.

"You're my family," Hitoshi whispers. "You're my brother and I love you too."

Kakashi knows family. Family comes before anything, family comes before yourself.

He smiles at his little brother, and Hitoshi tentatively smiles back, eyes glistening—

His Sharingan whirls to life.

Kakashi fulfills his promise.

Chapter End Notes

>:D

Funeral

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He wakes up with a racing heartbeat and a name on his lips.

“Kakashi.”

“What?” Hitoshi blinks blurrily.

“That’s what you kept saying when you were unconscious.” Aizawa sets a glass of water by his bedside table. “Does it mean something to you?”

“Oh. Kakashi...” Hitoshi searches his mind—

Silver hair, teasing eyes, a steady hand on his head

– and comes up blank.

“No, I can’t think of anything.”

“Hm.” Aizawa frowns. “Drink your water.”

Hitoshi gratefully does so. His throat is parched and the cold water helps halt his racing thoughts. He swirls the water in his mouth to get rid of the bad taste, then swallows.

“What happened?” He asks, setting the glass back down.

Aizawa’s face darkens. “We were hoping you could tell us that.”

For one single hanging moment, his mind is completely blank. His brain whirls as he tries to recall the events leading up to his current condition. Just one glorious second of nothingness and then—

Everything snaps into place.

Realization, a fight. A body crumpling.

A shining blade, blood painting the floor.

The memories slam back into Hitoshi’s skull like a physical weight, sending him gasping for air. They’re burned into his mind now, and he

can't even fathom how he could ever forget them. Bile rises in the back of his throat, and he does a little hiccup to choke it back down. He feels like he's going to puke.

Hitoshi's head jerks up. "Snipe-sensei. Is he- is he-?"

Aizawa's face twists, and dread is pooling in Hitoshi's gut because he already knows, he knows—

"By the time we got there, there was nothing we could do. I'm very sorry to tell you that Snipe didn't make it."

"Right," Hitoshi says. "Right. I mean, I knew, I saw it, it was so deep so there was no way—" A compulsive giggle slips past his lips, and he slaps a hand over his own mouth in horror.

"Sorry, I just." He wants to cry but he feels like he's been completely drained of tears. "I was right there."

Aizawa puts a hand on his shoulder. "Look at me, Shinsou."

There are tears in his eyes after all as he meets his teacher's gaze.

"It's not your fault," Aizawa says firmly.

"You don't know that," Hitoshi blurts. "You weren't there."

"It's true that I wasn't there, but I do know you," Aizawa tells him. "Protect your comrades and the people you care about, right? I'm certain you did your very best in whatever situation you found yourself in. Losing people is hard, but never for one second believe that it's your fault."

"Right," Hitoshi says again. "I- yeah. Thanks, sensei."

He plays over the events in his mind. He tries to find another way, a different course of action he could have taken... Looking back, it's true that there was really nothing else he could have done, but still, guilt curls like poisoned vines wrapping around his trapped body. No matter what anyone says, he'll always know without a doubt that Snipe's death was his fault.

Aizawa sighs. "We're going to need to get your report on what happened, but if you're not feeling up to it yet—"

"I'll tell you everything," Hitoshi says, cutting him off. "I'm ready."

"If you're sure..." He hesitates. "Alright, I'll go get everyone."

Aizawa disappears out the infirmary door, and Hitoshi slumps back against his pillows. Then the heroes begin entering his room, and he's forced to sit up straight once more.

"You're ready to give your report?" Sir Nighteye asks. He's settled at the foot of Hitoshi's bed with a notebook ready in his hand.

Hitoshi swallows. "Yeah. So." He looks around at the various heroes arrayed throughout his hospital room. His eye catches Aizawa's, who nods back at him comfortingly.

He sucks in a breath and launches into it. "The initial breach went fine, but after we separated from the main group to cover the west corridor of the compound, we could tell something was going on. We didn't have to fight anyone because everyone we came across was unconscious. We kept coming across groups of disarmed and bound Yakuza members who had been knocked out. I- I considered the idea that it might be Katana, but Katana usually kills, so I didn't say anything and we kept going."

He wishes he'd warned Snipe. He wishes they'd stayed clear. But no. Instead, they had chosen to press on.

"It was *Katana*?" Fat Gum demands. "Katana killed Snipe?"

Hitoshi clenches his fists. *An emotionless mask. Red lines on white.*

"Let him speak," Aizawa orders. "Hitoshi, are you okay to keep going?"

"Yeah, I'm... I'm okay." He clears his throat. "So, we kept going, and as we went further in, we found more signs of a struggle. The intruder was getting tired, and we even stumbled upon one of the members of the Eight Bullets, Tengai, I believe. The vigilante managed to knock him out, but there was blood everywhere, and I think Tengai had injured him pretty badly."

"The vigilante," Ryukyu notes. "This would be Katana?"

Hitoshi grits his teeth and starts speaking faster. "We were scouting inside one of the far rooms. Just inside their giant storage rooms off the main corridor. And that's when we ran into him. Hound. He was injured and limping, and we cornered him at the back of the room."

“Hound,” Nighteye says thoughtfully.

Aizawa’s eyes widen, then narrow once again.

“Snipe offered him the chance to turn himself in,” Hitoshi continues, feeling his throat closing up with every word. “He told him that we could give him a more lenient sentence and instead get him to join a rehabilitation program with a potential future in heroics, but he didn’t take it.”

He didn’t take it. Why didn’t he take it? Snipe had held his hand out and promised him everything, but still he hadn’t accepted. Hitoshi isn’t sure why he feels so strongly about this, but he knows in his heart that he will never forgive the vigilante for not taking Snipe’s hand.

“He said, uh. That no one would want a hero like him. And then he got ready to attack, and I just knew. It’s his fighting style, his stance and everything. It was the exact same as Katana’s was when we fought that time, I could just tell. I blurted it out, and then Snipe knew too.”

Hitoshi looks miserably at the crowd of heroes clustered around him. “Hound is Katana.”

Ryuku’s eyes widen, Fat Gum’s mouth drops open in shock, and Nighteye just looks quietly resigned. Aizawa, though. Aizawa’s expression is an unusual mix of regretful sorrow. Hitoshi wonders if Aizawa might feel the same way that he does. Although Katana is a murderer, although he killed Snipe, did his time as the heroic Hound mean nothing? If he had only stayed in the light, if he had only believed in his possibility for redemption...

But actions have consequences. Hound needs to face his, even if Hitoshi has to personally ensure it.

Hitoshi takes a shaky breath and continues his account. "When Katana realized we knew his identity, he tried to escape. I tried to use my quirk to stop him, but he didn't reply at all. I didn't want to personally fight him again- I know he's able to overpower me, and so Snipe took the lead. Originally he was trying to incapacitate him non-lethally, but--"

His voice wavers, and he pauses for a moment, trying to collect himself.

"Katana was fast. Really fast. I think when we first fought, he was

definitely holding back. I was trying to cover Snipe as he was aiming, and he wasn't responding to my quirk, so I drew my tanto, and—" Hitoshi pauses. He can hear the guilt laced through his voice. "He won last time in a drawn out spar, but he didn't even have a sword out this time, and I thought I could at least... I was wrong. He disarmed me so fast, I couldn't even get a move in. Then he took my tanto and—"

A shining blade, blood painting the floor.

He finishes the rest in a rush, the words tumbling out of his mouth. "He stabbed Snipe straight through the chest. I- I could see the blade poking out and— I tried to get to his side, I was going to- to- put pressure on it or something, but then Katana knocked me out. And that's all I remember."

He looks down at his trembling hands, unable to meet the eyes of the heroes around him.

"I see." Sir Nighteye snaps his notebook shut. "Thank you for telling us."

"We'll have to update Katana's profile," Ryukyu murmurs.

"He won't get away with this," Fat Gum declares. "There will be justice for Snipe."

The heroes slowly trickle out, and soon it's just him and Aizawa in the room once more. As soon as they're alone, his teacher clears his throat.

"Shinsou, it's not your fault," Aizawa says firmly. "You did everything you could under incredibly difficult circumstances. None of us could have predicted this, and sometimes, even heroes face situations that are beyond their control."

"I just..." Hitoshi's voice catches in his throat, and he takes a moment to compose himself. "I couldn't do anything. I let Katana get away, and I couldn't protect Snipe."

I killed Snipe, the voice in his head chants. It's not true, it's Katana's fault more than anything, but he still knows. *I killed him I killed him he's dead because I killed him—*

Aizawa grips Hitoshi's shoulder tightly, and meets his gaze with unwavering support. "You are not responsible for Katana's actions. He made the choices that resulted in Snipe's death. You did everything

you could to protect your teammate, and sometimes, despite our best efforts, things don't go the way we want them to."

Hitoshi just nods, feeling a current of exhaustion sweeping through him.

"I should let you get some more rest." Aizawa pauses. "I couldn't help but wonder though, did you not have any family to come visit you in the hospital? Parents or guardians?"

A bitter smile flickers across Hitoshi's lips. He hasn't seen his parents in a *very* long time, and as for guardians...

"We'll be living together now, just us!"

He places his hand over his eye and blinks blurrily as something in his mind seems to flicker in and out. The world churns slowly back into focus.

Wow. He must be really exhausted.

"Shinsou?"

"No." Hitoshi replies softly. "There's no one."

—

They discharge him with symptoms for a mild concussion. It's nothing serious, but he is showing slight signs of dazed and stunned behaviour. It could also be the emotional turmoil though. Hitoshi isn't quite sure himself. Aizawa wants to keep him close, but eventually Hitoshi begs to be let out by himself once more, with no small amount of suspicion on Aizawa's part.

It's habit that leads to him stepping off the train three stops earlier than the one closest to his apartment. He barely has time to process his own actions before the doors are sliding shut behind him. Hitoshi stands there for a second, questioning his decisions. Then he shrugs and starts walking.

The only relevant thing in this neighbourhood is the flower shop that he often frequents. *Mokuton Flowers*, a weird name, but a lovely shop filled with sweet smelling blooms and a friendly yet eccentric owner. He spends a lot of his time there actually, strange considering he's never been overly obsessed with flowers, but somehow that place just gives off the feeling of a home away from home.

Snipe's funeral is coming up, and Hitoshi might as well get him some flowers. It's the very least he can do.

His shoes echo against the cracked cement as he traces the familiar path. Winding through the quiet streets, he passes by well-kept flower beds and peaceful parks. He waits for the light to turn, then crosses the pedestrian walkway, walking until he reaches the shop with wide glass windows and an intricately carved wooden sign.

Mokuton Flowers, the familiar sign reads.

In front of that, there's another sign. This one says, *For Sale*.

Hitoshi pushes down the deep pang of loss and continues walking.

—

When he gets home, everything is quiet.

He doesn't know why he would expect anything different. This is his everyday life. Coming home after school, studying in his empty apartment, making dinner for one. Why does it suddenly seem so lonely?

The wall calendar tells him that it's Wednesday. *Dinner Out*, it says, scribbled over the date in big red letters. Hitoshi's not even sure why he made that a tradition in the first place. He's in no mood to go out for dinner tonight anyway.

Instant ramen it is.

It's weird that his walls suddenly seem so barren. He has some posters up, and clippings and old print-outs of Eraserhead in action, but there are blank spaces with pocked pin marks, conspicuously absent of photos or prints. Hitoshi grits his teeth and sees—

Glossy paper, matching hoodies, two sets of grinning teeth and an arm pulling the other close

—that he should probably rearrange the positioning or something. He must have taken his old posters down.

It's as he's tucking into his meal that he finds himself crying all over again. It's ridiculous. He's already shed his tears, and it's not like crying will accomplish anything anyway. If it did, he'd have brought Snipe back ten times over already. Besides, he doesn't even deserve to

cry. Not when it's all his fault.

Even as Aizawa repeatedly tells him that he's not responsible, Hitoshi can't avoid the gnawing guilt that eats at him no matter what he does. He reviews the scene built into his mind over and over, and even though he knows that Katana far overpowers him and that he never stood a chance, he can't help the way he feels.

It's illogical, but in his heart, he knows. He might as well have plunged his tanto straight through Snipe's chest himself.

Hitoshi hunches over his bowl of ramen that is slowly growing cold. He feels empty and hollow, but at the same time, he feels full of some mysterious emotion that wants to burst out of him but is stoppered like a corked bottle. He feels like he could sit here forever, unmoving, growing cold and stale like the ramen before him.

Is he going to feel like this forever? His chest feels tight, but it doesn't hurt. He wishes it did.

He wishes he could fix this. He knows he can't, nothing he could ever do would bring Snipe back or fix anything, but he wishes he could.

Most of all, he wishes someone was here to tell him that everything was going to be okay.

The apartment feels so empty.

—

After the school ceremony comes the private funeral.

Hitoshi is invited to it. He would have rather not been invited, but he is, so he has to go. He wouldn't dare dishonour Snipe-sensei by refusing to go to his funeral out of this misplaced sense of shame and guilt.

The day dawns bright and clear. Hitoshi hates it. It's a nice enough ceremony, but he barely hears a single word. He's too focused on all the other staff members, their dark eyes and solemn expressions.

My fault, he tells himself. *They look like that because of me.*

He can't do anything to fix this, he can't change the past. He doesn't know what to do with his life now. He used to have all these goals, but somehow in the face of this tragedy, they've all withered away.

What can he do? If he swears that he'll make things right, how could he ever accomplish it?

Aizawa shows up at some point, appearing out of nowhere from behind him. Hitoshi doesn't jump, he just looks tiredly up at his teacher.

"Sensei?"

"I just wanted to check in with you," Aizawa says. "How are you doing?"

"I'm fine." The words automatically slip past his lips.

Aizawa studies him. "You aren't."

"It doesn't matter."

"It does to me." His teacher looks strangely concerned. "You talk about protecting everyone all the time. You're always looking out for your friends and teammates. You don't need to do it alone, Shinsou. Let other people look after you."

"I..."

"Have you ever had anyone to protect *you*?" Aizawa asks softly.

Hitoshi thinks back to the only people he's ever had in his life. His father, who hated him. His mother, who feared him. His—

I love you I love you I'll always protect you—

"I guess," he lies.

"Well, they're hardly doing a good job," Aizawa says sharply. His tone softens. "Shinsou, I've told you this before, but if you ever need anything, if you ever just want to talk... I'll be here. You're my student, and it's my responsibility to protect you and look after you." He pauses. "I care about you."

"I— yeah. I know. Thank you."

His teacher nods firmly. "Terrible things will happen, but it's important that we move past them. We can only ensure that they never happen again." He hesitates, then claps a hand on Hitoshi's shoulder before vanishing back into the crowd.

Well that's something. He thinks about his teacher's words. Is that really all he can do? Move past it and make sure it never happens again? He supposes if he can't fix it, then the only way to progress is forward. And so...

He'll ensure it. He can devote his life to something after all. He'll avenge Snipe, he'll stop Katana, and he'll make sure that murderer never kills anyone like that ever again.

"Ahem." Someone clears their throat, and Hitoshi whips around again. It's Sir Nighteye, wearing his signature yellow glasses and carrying a sword in his hands. Is that...?

"We finished with the investigations," the hero informs him. "We were unable to identify any new fingerprints, and all evidence can now be returned. As I was told this is a precious object to you and your signature weapon, I am now able to return it to you."

Hitoshi looks at the dull sheath hiding the silver blade within.

A shining blade—

"It's not precious." Hitoshi says flatly. "I don't want it back, but thanks anyway."

"... I see. In that case, it will probably return to evidence lockup, and will eventually be disposed of."

"We couldn't have the White Fang without his tanto."

Hitoshi shrugs.

"I guess I don't need it anymore."

Chapter End Notes

Just one last scene left.

Aftermath

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sun beats down and the wind whistles through his hair from his precarious perch. Kakashi sighs and shifts, rolling back on the balls of his feet to hop backwards onto firmer ground. The roof of the police headquarters is not well guarded, unlike the building itself. Even then, Kakashi hardly had any trouble breaking in. With the liberal application of genjutsu and standard shinobi stealth skills, the trip to the records room and back was done in no time at all.

The trawl through the clunky old computer took a bit longer, but he got the job done eventually. A few alterations, backspace to delete... Is it really this easy? It feels like it should be more momentous somehow, like a simple clack of the keys and click of the mouse isn't enough. It's his *life*.

Ah, well. Not anymore, it isn't.

Papers crinkle in his hand as he flicks through the dusty pages. He's hit all the necessary places holding any physical copies, so this is his last stop. These remaining papers are it.

The last physical records of his own existence.

Kakashi grimaces, pausing on the report transcript of his very first kill in this world. That's the day when he'd ruined things for good. He had taken away his brother's chance at having proper parents, foolishly believing that he would be enough. And look what he'd done.

He's gone now, though. For all intents and purposes, Shinsou Shiro is dead. Even Shinsou Kakashi is no more, or rather, he never existed at all.

It's for the best. Really. He's done so much damage to Hitoshi without ever realizing it, and as much as he tries to protect his brother and support his dreams, he can only cause him harm. In his mind, he can still see Hitoshi's face twisted in anguish, crying into his chest as he begs Kakashi to fix things.

"Kashi-nii, it's going to be okay, right?"

I promise, whatever it takes—

Kakashi flicks the lighter open and feeds the tips of the papers into the bright flame. He watches as it catches, swiftly devouring the small packet and eating through it until there's nothing left but ash. The smouldering remains drift away on the breeze, carried away to who knows where.

Elsewhere, he can hear the solemn tolling of bells.

Farewell, Shinsou Kakashi.

He can only hope that Hitoshi will find his way to happiness without him.

The wind whistles, carrying the echoes of a life left behind.

Chapter End Notes

Farewell, Shinsou Kakashi.

End Notes

And that's it! Thank you for sticking with me all this time, even through all the cliffhangers. I hope you enjoyed (ha) reading this story! Afterwards, I imagine Kakashi would continue to protect Hitoshi by going to eliminate the League of Villains, while Hitoshi works towards catching the vigilante who ruined his life. I know this isn't the happiest of endings, but the angst was just too good.

I'll go hire some shinobi bodyguards now. But really, if you're going to blame anyone, you should blame the writer of the outline. Better start running, Jork.

Jork, you have my heart. Happy summer, and hope you had fun reading my personal take on this story! <3

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